Student Perception of the Attributes of Peer Mediators: Implications for Program Improvement

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STUDENT PERCEPTION OF THE ATTRIBUTES
OF PEER MEDIATORS: IMPLICATIONS FOR
PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Michelle Maree Bell
August 2002
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OF PEER MEDIATORS: IMPLICATIONS FOR
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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

Elsie P. Jackson, Ph.D.
Chair

Interim Dean, School of Education
James R. Jeffery, Ph.D.

Judith A. Anderson, Ph.D.
Member

James R. Jeffery, Ph.D.
Member

Rene Drumm, Ph.D.
External

July 18, 2002
Date approved

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ABSTRACT

STUDENT PERCEPTION OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF PEER MEDIATORS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

by

Michelle Maree Bell

Chair: Elsie P. Jackson
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

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Title: STUDENT PERCEPTION OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF PEER MEDIATORS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

Name of researcher: Michelle Maree Bell

Name and degree of faculty chair: Elsie P. Jackson, Ph.D.

Date completed: August 2002

Problem

Limited research has been done regarding the magnitude of the attributes of peer mediators and its impact on elementary students. The purpose of this study was to examine fourth- through sixth-grade students' perception of the attributes of peer mediators at four rural elementary schools located in Pinconning, Michigan.

Method

This study examined the fourth- through sixth-grade students' perception of the attributes of peer mediators using a qualitative approach. The data collection procedures included using a purposive sample of 24 peer mediators in focus groups, as well as 74
peacemakers and 79 disputants who participated in a questionnaire. Questions were open-ended to attain the participants' perspective in their own terms. Focus group responses were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim: themes were identified and sorted.

Results

In examining peer mediation, peacemakers and disputants discovered four core attributes that peacemakers should possess: A peacemaker should be (1) an effective problem solver, (2) kind, (3) an effective communicator, and (4) responsible and committed. Disputants additionally indicated that a peacemaker should be fair and maintain neutrality when intervening with a conflict.

Suggestions for program improvement were also examined, and the primary results conveyed (1) recruitment of more peacemakers who demonstrate kindness, fairness, responsibility, commitment, and effective problem solving and communication skills, (2) provision of more meetings and incentives for peacemakers, (3) utilization of two or more sets of peacemakers to serve duty on the playground, (4) collection of additional disputant information, and (5) provision of additional guidance and support to address uncooperative disputants, to stop teasing directed toward peacemakers, to cease interruptions from bystanders during conflict resolution, and to modify scheduling for peacemakers who are required to be absent from class as a result of fulfilling their responsibility to serve duty.

Conclusions

Peer mediators and peer mediation program facilitators must be cognizant of the qualities a peer mediator should possess to promote a successful peer mediation program.
The attributes and implications learned from this study can be emphasized as valuable factors in promoting an effective peer mediation program, therefore, it would be worthwhile to consider these factors when training peer mediators and coordinating a peer mediation program.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Conflict is a natural and normal part of life, but conflict may escalate into violence if there is no intervention. The Center for the Prevention of School Violence defines school violence as "any behavior that violates a school's educational mission or climate of respect or jeopardizes the intent of the school to be free of aggression against persons or property, drugs, weapons, disruptions, and disorder" (Riley, 2000, p. 121).

With the heightened media attention of school violence in the United States, peer mediation is being addressed more frequently as a violence prevention and conflict resolution program in the field of education. Mediation is defined as a structured process that involves disputants in the resolution of their own conflicts (Tolson & McDonald, 1992).

Peer mediation is one of the oldest and most common forms of conflict resolution, which has played an increasingly significant role at all levels of society (Messing, 1993). Many schools are implementing peer mediation programs to empower students to come to a peaceful solution to their problem.

Supporters of peer mediation believe that using children to assist other children is a valid and worthwhile way to resolve conflicts between children (Humphries, 1999; Lane & McWhirter, 1992). "Children understand and trust other children. They speak
the same language and share common concerns. Student mediators do not pose a threat to other students because they do not represent authority" (Schmidt, Friedman, & Marvel, 1992, p. ii). In peer programs, students become role models and feel good about themselves for helping someone else, which is a key element in all peer programs (Gartner, 1996).

**Statement of the Problem**

There is an increase in conflicts as options and decisions necessitated by family, economic, and social stresses increase (Messing, 1993). Children and adolescents who are frustrated and angry have a high probability of physically or verbally acting out against those with whom they have a conflict. The conflict can range from name-calling, pushing and shoving, to the extreme of killing (Wheeler, 1995).

Peer mediation programs are being utilized in schools as a conflict resolution program; however, advocates of peer mediation have received criticism regarding whether or not their programs are successful. Conflict resolution and peer mediation training programs have been accepted on faith, but there is little evidence to validate their effectiveness (Johnson & Johnson, 1995, 1997).

According to Kevin Dwyer, special advisor to the National Mental Health Association in Virginia, “There is no evidence that peer mediation works. . . . We rely on cheap solutions to complex problems and end up spending the money later on in prisons and hospitals” (Zipp, 2001, p. 1). Peer mediation advocates claim, however, that there are many benefits such as reduction in violence and acts of crime in schools using peer mediation, reduction in counselor and administrator time in dealing with student discord, enhanced self-esteem, improved attendance, and development of leadership and problem
solving skills on the part of students. These claims are supported by self-report and correlational data (Benson & Benson, 1993; Curona & Guerin, 1994, as cited in Gerber, 1999).

Nationwide, many schools are utilizing various models of peer mediation, but a greater understanding is needed regarding the attributes of peer mediators and their impact on elementary students. According to Peterson and Skiba (2000), the spread of peer mediation programs around the country has outpaced research on their effects and, as a result, there is still much we need to know about the effectiveness of peer mediation.

Limited research has been done regarding the magnitude of the attributes of peer mediators and its impact with a successful elementary peer mediation program. Thus, peer mediators and peer mediation program facilitators must be cognizant of the qualities a peer mediator should possess to promote a successful peer mediation program.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine fourth- through sixth-grade students’ perception of the attributes of peer mediation at four rural elementary schools located in Pinconning, Michigan. The aim is to assist peer mediation program facilitators by providing a profile of attributes that will serve as a component of integration in peer mediation program training and coordination, to enhance the quality of existing and future peer mediation programs.

**Setting Description**

The Pinconning Area School District is located in Pinconning, Michigan, a rural town in northern Bay County. The 2000-2001 student enrollment for the Pinconning Area School District consisted of 2,075 students. There are four elementary schools
within the boundaries of Pinconning. Pinconning Central Elementary has an enrollment of 444 students, Mt. Forest Elementary has an enrollment of 206 students, Linwood Elementary has an enrollment of 232 students and Garfield-Fraser Elementary has an enrollment of 149 students for a total of 1,031 elementary students.

The majority of students enrolled in the district represent a low to middle socioeconomic status. Twenty-nine percent of the students receive free lunch. The average income in Pinconning is $23,000 per year while the average income in Bay County is $29,000. Seven percent of the adult population's academic standing in Pinconning have received their Bachelor's degree with the state average being 16%. Ninety-five percent of the students are Caucasian, while 4% are Hispanic, and 1% represent other groups (J. Felske, personal communication, June 12, 2001).

Research Questions

Based on the literature and my knowledge of peer mediation, this study attempted to answer the following questions, which will have direct implications for current peer mediation practices:

1. What is the peacemaker’s perception of his or her attributes in an elementary peer mediation program?

2. What is the disputants’ perception of the peacemakers’ attributes in an elementary peer mediation program?

3. What are the implications for program improvement?
Significance of Study

Currently, many elementary schools are utilizing peer mediation as a conflict resolution program. Therefore, the study of peer mediation within a traditional elementary school is a legitimate field of study.

The results of this study will provide data and insight for future adaptations of elementary peer mediation programs. The research will make efforts to understand and address attributes of peer mediation, thus, providing valuable information regarding the strengths and weaknesses of current practices of peer mediation and how to improve these programs.

The invitation for meaningful student collaboration with improvement effort conveys a message that school districts seek and value student involvement. In turn, the meaningful involvement of students will likely enhance ownership and greater commitment to performance improvement changes. The procedures used in this research may also be tailored to assist with ongoing evaluation of any peer mediation program.

This study will be of particular interest to educators, peer mediator facilitators and school administrators as they make decisions about implementing peer mediation within their school system.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined as used in this study.

**Attribute:** A characteristic quality or trait of a peer mediator.

**Audit:** Re-reading and re-checking data.

**Audit trail:** One or more persons responsible for re-reading and re-checking data.

**Conflict:** A disagreement, dispute, quarrel, or problem (Schmidt et al., 1992).
Conflict resolution: A method of problem-solving skills to resolve a conflict.

Dispute: A disagreement or an argument.

Disputant: A person who takes part in a dispute or conflict (Schmidt et al., 1992).

Focus group: A carefully planned discussion designed to acquire perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment (Krueger, 1988).

Mediate: To act as a peacemaker between disputants.

Mediation: A structured process that involves disputants in the resolution of their own conflicts (Tolson & McDonald, 1992).

Member check: Asking participants to clarify their responses for accuracy.

Peacemaker program: A term used interchangeably to describe a peer mediation program.

Peer mediation: A systematic session where two trained peer mediators assist disputants with coming to a peaceful solution to their problem.

Peer mediator (Also known as a peacemaker): A team of two students who are trained to assist their peers with problem solving.

School violence: The Center for Prevention of School Violence defines school violence as “any behavior that violates a school’s educational mission or climate of respect or jeopardizes the intent of the school to be free of aggression against persons or property, drugs, weapons, disruptions, and disorder” (Riley, 2000, p. 121).

Triangulation: A process using multiple sources of data or multiple methods to confirm emerging findings.
Limitations

The small convenience size of the focus groups reduced the generalizability of the results.

Delimitations

1. The study was conducted in Pinconning, Michigan, a small rural town in Mid-Michigan.
2. The study was conducted with Grades 4, 5, and 6 and may produce different results in middle and high school.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 consists of the background of the current study, a statement of the problem, a description of the purpose of the study, the setting description, the research questions, the significance of study, definitions of terms, limitations and delimitations of the study, and a description of the organization of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature. Information on the following topics will be provided: school climate, school conflict, school conflict resolution, and peer mediation.

Chapter 3 addresses the rationale for qualitative design, participant selection, site selection, peer mediation procedures, question selection, data collection, data analysis, and methods for verification.

Chapter 4 presents the main findings of the study and a summary of qualitative data and results.

Chapter 5 provides the summary, results, findings, discussion, conclusion, and recommendations for peer mediation programs and future research.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 presents some research data on school conflict and the utilization of peer mediation as a conflict resolution program for schools. This chapter will focus on the definition of peer mediation, as well as a description of the history, philosophy, theories, benefits, and recommendations of peer mediation.

School Climate

Violence prevention, conflict resolution, and peer mediation are areas being addressed more frequently in the field of education. Providing a quality education for students is becoming increasingly challenging for school professionals as student conflicts escalate and interfere with the education process.

To promote an effective school, students need to feel safe at school. Peterson and Skiba (2000) state that school climate addresses positive or negative feelings regarding the school environment. They define school climate as "the feelings that students and staff have about the school environment over a period of time" (p. 122). These feelings may include how comfortable each individual feels in the environment, whether the individual feels that the environment is supportive of learning or teaching, if the environment is appropriately organized, and if it is safe. Peterson and Skiba (2000) indicate that comfortable and supportive feelings support effective and efficient learning.
and teaching, as well as positive student behavior and attitudes. However, negative feelings such as concern, fear, frustration, and loneliness would negatively affect learning and behavior. Therefore, school climate is a reflection of the positive or negative feelings regarding the school environment, and it may directly or indirectly affect a variety of learning outcomes.

School Conflict

According to *Stop the Violence, 1994*, although conflict is a natural and normal part of life, the severity and frequency of destructively managed conflicts leading to physical and verbal violence seem to be increasing in schools (Johnson & Johnson, 1996a). Conflict is a term used to describe a disagreement, dispute, quarrel, or problem (Schmidt et al., 1992). The word conflict has its roots in the Latin word *confictus*, meaning, "striking together" (Trevaskis, 1994, p. 1).

The Community Board Program (*Conflict Resolution: A Curriculum for Youth Providers, 1990*) notes three sources in describing the various causes of conflict: (1) conflicts over resources, (2) conflicts over psychological needs, and (3) conflicts involving values. Unresolved and lingering conflict frequently leads to violence, interfering with productivity and the quality of life in schools and the community. "Public schools—where roles are taken, rules are enforced, and behaviors are monitored—are breeding grounds for emotional and intense interpersonal conflict" (Shulman, 1996, p. 170). Teachers encounter a variety of numerous conflicts every day, which may be overt, subtle, big, small, racial, or cultural (Vatalaro, 1999). "All interpersonal relationships, including those within our schools, experience conflict" (Six & Marlor, 1996, p. 5). These disputes can occur daily during normal interactions between diverse people living,
working, and playing together. Major interpersonal problems seem to arise more from how we attempt to solve conflicts than from the disputes themselves; therefore, conflict itself is not necessarily bad. Conflict exists whenever people compete in order to meet their complex, diverse needs, whatever they may be (Six & Marlor, 1996).

There is also an increase in conflicts as options and decisions necessitated by family, economic, and social stresses increase (Messing, 1993). Children and adolescents who are frustrated and angry have a high probability of physically or verbally acting out against those with whom they have a conflict. The conflict can range from name-calling, pushing and shoving, to the extreme of killing (Wheeler, 1995).

In examining school conflicts, Morse and Andrea (1994) indicate that students act out certain behaviors. These behaviors may include 'withdrawers' who avoid conflicts, 'smoothers' who want the other party to be happy, 'compromisers' who want both sides to win a little and lose a little, 'forcers' who bully their way through conflicts, and 'confronters' who state their needs openly and directly. They learn that conflicts over "misunderstandings" and "things" are easier to resolve than conflicts over beliefs or values (p. 53). Hart and Gunty (1997) believe conflict arises in relationships when one person, in pursuit of his or her goals, interferes with another's goals.

Lam (1989) indicates that most students seem to be unaware or ignorant regarding the steps that would allow them to manage conflicts constructively (as cited in Johnson & Johnson, 1996c). There appears to be no general consensus among school-age children as to how to manage conflicts effectively as many school-age children use destructive and ineffective conflict resolution strategies. This is problematic for the quality of life within schools and for problems children will encounter in the future.
On the destructive side, conflicts can create anger, hostility, lasting animosity, violence, pain, sadness, and can end in divorce, lawsuits, and war. On the positive side, conflicts are constructive when all disputants are satisfied with the outcome, the relationship between the disputants is strengthened and improved, and disputants are able to resolve future conflicts constructively (Johnson & Johnson, 1996b). Johnson and Johnson (1996b) summarize the following points that make conflict valuable:

1. Conflicts can increase achievement and long-term retention of academic material.

2. Conflicts are the key to using higher-level cognitive and moral reasoning and healthy cognitive, social, and psychological development.

3. Conflicts focus attention on problems that have to be solved and energize us to solve them.

4. Conflicts clarify who you are, what your values are, what you care about and are committed to, and how you may need to change.

5. Conflicts help you understand who the other person is and what his or her values are.

6. Conflicts strengthen relationships by increasing your confidence that the two of you can resolve your disagreements and by keeping the relationship clear of irritations and resentments so that positive feelings can be experienced fully.

7. Conflicts can release anger, anxiety, insecurity, and sadness that, if kept inside, make us mentally sick.

8. Conflicts can be fun (Johnson & Johnson, 1996b, p. 11).
What determines whether conflicts result in these positive outcomes is how skillfully students and faculty use negotiation and mediation procedures.

**School Conflict Resolution**

Many communities are beginning to take proactive approaches to deal with a crisis including the initiation of conflict resolution programs in kindergarten, middle school and high school (Wilburn & Bates, 1997). Conflict resolution is one way to reduce school violence because it empowers students with the skills to peacefully resolve disagreements (Torma, 2000).

The origination of conflict resolution dates back to Mary Parker Follett's research in the 1920s. Follett focused on “problem solving as integration of the needs of the bargainers” (Fogg, 1985; Follett, 1941, as cited in Stomfay-Stitz, 1994, p. 279). Subsequently, conflict resolution has extended into business management, intergroup and community mediation, divorce, juvenile justice, civil courts, and international negotiations (Stomfay-Stitz, 1994).

According to Johnson and Johnson (1996b), the problem facing schools is how to manage conflicts in constructive and healthy ways. The major barrier to solving this problem is the students' lack of effective skills in conflict resolution. Johnson and Johnson (1995) contend, “All students, not a select few, need to learn how to manage conflicts. Everyone—students, faculty, and staff—must use conflict resolution procedures” (p. 12). “Successful schools understand conflict resolution as a form of democracy in action. It is a tool to allow for greater participation in the resolution of problems with respect for diverse perspectives” (Opffer, 1997, p. 48).
Conflict resolution teaches students to use alternatives to violence when resolving their interpersonal and personal problems (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). Conflict resolution programs are attracting attention for a variety of reasons such as learning effective life skills and building self-esteem. “Teaching young people conflict resolution skills empowers them to resolve their own disputes without adult intervention, which results in effective decision making, a valuable life skill” (Close & Lechman, 1997, p. 14).

Consequently, schools have made the commitment to teach students the procedures they need to manage conflicts constructively; and, without direct training, many students may never learn to do so.

Johnson & Johnson (1994) found:

The most comprehensive study of conflict management by children was conducted by DeCecco and Richards (1974), who interviewed more than 8,000 students and 500 faculty members in more than 60 junior and senior high schools in the New York City, Philadelphia, and San Francisco areas. They found that over 90% of the conflicts reported by students were perceived to be unresolved or to be resolved in destructive ways. Open negotiation of conflicts was practically nonexistent. DeCecco and Richards concluded that within schools, individuals are trying either to shun conflict or to crush the opposition. (p. 804)

Since conflicts occur continually, and because so many people are so unskilled in managing conflicts, teaching students how to resolve conflicts constructively is one of the best investments schools can make. After conflict skills are mastered effectively, they go with students to every situation and every relationship. The use of effective conflict resolution skills also helps to increase a student’s future academic and career success, improves the quality of relationships with friends, colleagues, and family, and generally enhances their lifelong happiness (Johnson & Johnson, 1996b).

Some students use procedures for managing conflicts, but often these procedures are not constructive and not shared by all classmates. There are many different methods.
of managing conflicts within classrooms, which may create confusion with how to
manage conflicts. This is especially true when students come from different cultural,
ethnic, social class, and language backgrounds. It is helpful when all students and staff
use the same negotiation and mediation procedures in managing conflicts.

Johnson and Johnson (1996b) found that to skillfully and gracefully manage
conflicts, individuals need:

1. To understand the procedures for managing conflicts constructively.
Everyone involved must understand and use the same procedures as different individuals
often have different ideas about how to manage conflicts. Some rely on physical
dominance through threats and violence. Others use verbal attack, the cold shoulder,
giving in, or getting even. When two individuals involved in a conflict are using
different procedures, chaos results. If conflicts are to be managed constructively,
everyone has to use the same procedures to resolve them. Because the procedures for
resolving conflicts constructively are not learned in most families or from television,
movies, or novels, students must learn them at school.

2. The opportunity to practice the procedures to gain real skill and expertise
in their use. Resolving conflicts takes great skill and practice. Schools need to
emphasize over-learning of the conflict resolution procedures by having students'
practice the procedures again and again.

3. Norms and values to encourage and support the use of the procedures. If
people know how to manage conflicts constructively, it does not mean that they will do
so. As long as school norms emphasize working alone and valuing “winners,” students
will “go for the win” in a conflict rather than by trying to solve the problem (p. 3).
Influence theory suggests that to shape student behavior, the school must shape the student’s decision-making. Once the school provides a new premise-setting structure, such as a peer mediation program, support from significant others encourages the individual to conform to its practice and goals. The goal is to increase the likelihood that students will solve conflicts cooperatively rather than aggressively (Hart & Gunty, 1997). Violent behavior is learned through modeling and reinforcement and these same processes can be used to teach children nonviolence (Committee for Children, 1989).

Successful conflict resolution often produces a significant improvement in relationships and in working and living conditions. In the past 10 years, one of the oldest and most common forms of conflict resolution, mediation, has played an increasingly significant role at all levels of society (Messing, 1993). Conflict resolution teaches students to use alternatives to violence when resolving their interpersonal and personal problems. Instruction in conflict resolution is typically presented in conjunction with a classroom or school-wide peer-mediation program (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). Vatalaro (1999) states that conflict resolution and peer mediation not only provide teachers with practical information and lessons for classroom implementation, they can guide students in understanding the nature of conflicts, dealing with discord, and making peace skillfully. Vatalaro (1999) also contends that conflict resolution and peer mediation programs link well to a variety of content areas, particularly language and social studies.

Organizations and communities nationwide are endorsing conflict resolution programs. Teaching students problem-solving skills through a school-wide conflict resolution program that includes peer mediation can help students resolve the inevitable conflicts they encounter in the school environment (Daunic, Smith, Robinson, Landry, &

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Miller, 2000). According to Opffer (1997), steps toward cultural transformation include integrating peer mediation with conflict resolution curriculum in classrooms. Lately, many American public schools have instituted peer mediation programs as their primary strategy for conflict resolution.

While conflicts are inevitable when people interact, counterproductive and destructive behavior among students, which could lead to violence and conflict in our schools, can be reduced through peer mediation (Morse & Andrea, 1994). After experiencing mediation, disputants learn what they might do to solve any future disputes and they learn to talk with, not at, each other to find a solution to their problem. The disputants may also discover that they can resolve conflicts without the aid of a mediator. The consequences of talking with another student, problem solving, and attempting to find mutually acceptable nonviolent solutions are far less likely to result in the grief that is often an outcome of not talking about the problem (Six & Marlor, 1996).

In March 1997, Attorney General Janet Reno called for schools across the country to consider adopting peer mediation programs as a way for students to learn how to talk out their dispute and refrain from the use of fists and weapons (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997, as cited in Torma, 2000).

**Peer Mediation**

"Mediation is a structured process that involves disputants in the resolution of their own conflicts. Assistance is provided by trained peers" (Tolson & McDonald, 1992, p. 86). According to Brunner (1947), mediation coincides with the biblical values of forgiveness, reconciliation, and community (as cited in Folberg & Taylor, 1984). Matt 5:9 also reads, "Blessed be the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God."
The concept of mediation has existed throughout cultures for many years. The church or temple has played an important part in resolving conflict among its members for centuries, as the local parish priest, minister, or rabbi was frequently called upon to serve as a mediator to solve disputes which usually occurred in families (Folberg & Taylor, 1984).

Beginning in the late 1960s, American society experienced a growing interest of alternative forms of dispute settlement (Folberg & Taylor, 1984). The Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, founded in 1963 to promote court-connected family conciliation, began promoting the use of mediation as an alternative to family court litigation. Locally, many neighborhood justice centers and community boards blossomed. Peer mediation has been established since 1981 (Opffer, 1997).

The Community Board Program of San Francisco established one of the nation's first community and school conflict resolution organizations (Conflict Resolution: A Curriculum for Youth Providers, 1990). The Community Board Program has found that the starting point in finding a resolution to conflict is the active participation of disputants.

In order to resolve a dispute, it is crucial that the disputants communicate directly to one another why the dispute is important, what it means to them, what emotions it has generated, what fears and angers have arisen, and what attitudes and impressions they have of the other disputant. (p. iv)

As school violence increases, many schools are implementing peer mediation programs to involve students directly in reducing violence and discipline problems. As of 1997, an estimated 7,500 to 10,000 peer mediation programs have been implemented in U.S. elementary, middle, and high schools (LeBoeuf & Delany-Shabazz, 1997, as cited in Williamson, Warner, Sandes, & Knepper, 1999).
Peer Mediation Philosophy

The research base for conflict resolution and peer mediation includes the theories of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Albert Bandura, and Kurt Lewin (Seifert, 1993, as cited in Stomfay-Stitz, 1994). Piaget’s cognitive development theory indicates that children will assimilate and accommodate new experiences into ones previously learned. The added context of social interaction, particularly with one’s peers, enhances the cognitive development process (Stomfay-Stitz, 1994).

Vygotsky’s (1962) theories regarding children’s thinking emphasized a process in which children shared problem-solving experiences with a teacher, parent, or peer. “As a result, children’s own language and thought intermingled and served as the vehicle for their own development” (as cited in Stomfay-Stitz, 1994, p. 280).

According to social learning theorists, Albert Bandura and Kurt Lewin also contributed to the research base. “Bandura emphasized that children are essential actors and agents in their own learning and behavior as they model, observe and duplicate responses to a social situation” (Carton & Allen, 1993; Seifert, 1993, as cited in Stomfay-Stitz, 1994, p. 280). Lewin believes that individuals in a school setting are affected by personal and environmental variables that have an impact on student behavioral outcomes and “one has to face the education situation with all its social and cultural implications as one concrete dynamic whole. . . . Analysis must be a ‘gestalt-theoretical’ one” (Maruyama, 1992, as cited in Stomfay-Stitz, 1994, p. 280).

Peer mediation is a method of conflict resolution that enables people involved in a conflict to reach a mutually acceptable agreement with the help of a neutral peer mediator (Torma, 2000). Peer mediators’ assist the disputing students’ to explain their perception
of the problem to each other and to find their own answers to their interpersonal problems. Peer mediation provides a structured forum for the resolution of disputes on school grounds and can empower children as it enables them to make decisions about issues and conflicts that affect their own lives (Lane & McWhirter, 1992).

Moriarty and McDonald (1991) identify the primary goal of mediation as to arrive at a win-win outcome rather than the traditional win-lose outcome of autocratic styles of dispute resolution. Consequently, the Kids In Dispute Settlement (K.I.D.S.) Peace Works program, from the Peace Education Foundation, outlines seven goals for peer mediation:

1. To resolve peer disputes that interfered with the education process
2. To build a stronger sense of cooperation and school community
3. To improve the school environment by decreasing tension and hostility
4. To increase student participation and develop leadership skills
5. To develop communication, critical thinking, and practical life skills
6. To improve student-student and student-teacher relationships

According to Demere-Mitchell (2000),

The goals of peer mediation in all of the literature are reestablishment of values and morals enabling students to trust and respect each other more and to build positive self-esteem. If these goals are met, there will be significant improvements in the school environment and a decrease of tension and hostility at home, with their siblings, and in the community. (p. 5)

Peace Works provides a student mediation manual that explains the basic skills for peer mediation. The program instructs students to listen carefully, be fair, ask how each disputant feels, keep information confidential, and mediate in private. Mediators
should not try to place blame, ask who started it, take sides, or give advice (Schmidt, Friedman, & Marvel, 1991, as cited in Stomfay-Stitz, 1994, p. 281).

Peer mediation offers alternatives to violence. Instead of physical fights, threats, and verbal abuse, students are taught explicit communication and conflict resolution skills, which lead students and peer mediators through a process of critical thinking and problem-solving in an effort to arrive at a mutually beneficial solution (Stomfay-Stitz, 1994). At the elementary school level, it is a powerful, cost-effective process that leaves participants feeling satisfied and respected while resolving conflicts. As they develop the necessary language and communication skills for successful mediation, students learn to listen to each other and to consider other viewpoints (Angaran & Beckwith, 1999b).

The mediation process may be formal or informal and disputants voluntarily agree to work on solutions. Students are more likely to honor their negotiated agreement because their solutions are not forced upon them. It also reduces the possibility that students will fight over the problem during or after the mediation. This is different from situations in which authority figures, such as the principals or teachers, tell the students what they will or will not do (Six & Marlor, 1996). Peer mediation is appropriate for the majority of school disputes except for those involving weapons’, drugs, or physical or sexual abuse (Wilburn & Bates, 1997).

Peer mediation may be referred to as a healing process between two or more disputants. For the healing process to begin, individuals in conflict must make a decision to invest their time, energy, and thoughts in resolving the situation. The process of mediation may be stressful, but confronting the problem to find a mutually acceptable solution will promote a state of harmony, which replaces the anger, frustration, and
alienation that has been felt. Most people benefit from having their side of a dispute told and heard, from brainstorming possible ways of solving the problem, evaluating the possible solutions, and choosing the best alternative to act on (Wheeler, 1995).

Peer mediation programs can generally be described as either “cadre,” in which a small number of students are trained to serve as a peer mediator, or “total body,” in which all students in the school are taught conflict resolution skills (Johnson & Johnson, 1996a, p. 281). “The majority of school-based mediation programs currently in use are based on models of community mediation such as San Francisco’s Community Board Program (1987)” (Humphries, 1999, p. 13). “Developers of the San Francisco Community Mediation Program had 5 years of experience settling disputes between neighbors and businesses before introducing its school-based Conflict Manager program” (Lane & McWhirter, 1992, p. 16).

Lane and McWhirter (1992) identify four stages of the mediation sequence: introduction, listening, wants, and solutions. During the first stage of peer mediation, the peer mediators introduce themselves, offer their services, review the rules, elicit commitment, and assure confidentiality. In the second stage, peer mediators reflect and restate content and feelings as they address each disputant. In stage three, peer mediators guide the disputants to express their wants, which are restated by the mediators, and in stage four, disputants are asked what they can contribute to the resolution of the problem.

The peer mediators restate the solutions and ask the disputants if the proposed solution is mutually acceptable. The mediators then ask the disputants how to handle such a conflict in the future and close the sequence by encouraging the disputants to tell their friends that the conflict has been solved. “After congratulating the students on...
solving their problem, the peer mediators complete a mediation report form” (Lane & McWhirter, 1992, p. 17).

**Peer Mediation Benefits**

Supporters of peer mediation believe that using children to assist other children is a valid and worthwhile way to resolve conflicts between children (Humphries, 1999; Lane & McWhirter, 1992). “Children understand and trust other children. They speak the same language and share common concerns. Student mediators do not pose a threat to other students because they do not represent authority” (Schmidt et al., 1992, p. ii).

Teaching students how to negotiate to resolve conflicts and how to mediate their peers’ conflicts empowers students to regulate their own behavior. Johnson and Johnson (1994) believe that if all students regulated their own conflict behavior, the quality of life in schools would improve, teachers would have more time and energy to instruct, and the future employability of the students would increase. “The school creates its own culture and trains students in how to behave appropriately within that culture” (Johnson & Johnson, 1995, p. 12).

Reports by administrators, teachers, students, parents, and others also confirm the benefits of conflict resolution and peer mediation.

In publications such as A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983), The Transition Years (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training OMET 1992), The Common Curriculum (OMET 1993), and The New Curriculum (OMET 1998), the needs identified as requisite in achieving academic excellence were listening, problem solving, oral-language expression, and critical thinking. The conflict resolution and peer mediation model addresses these needs. (Vatalaro, 1999, p. 117)

In 1994, California’s attorney general commended peer mediation as one of the most effective means to deter violence in public schools (Hakim, 1992, as cited in Close
& Lechman, 1997). At Waterford Mott High School in Michigan, the program has shown significant results, as last year, students resolved more than 90 disputes between students (Kalb et al., 1999). Daunic et al. (2000) also found that an effective peer mediation program can improve school climate as well.

Wheeler (1995) found that mutual problem solving, where both individuals agree to peacefully solve their differences through mediation, holds the potential of accomplishing the following:

1. Placing individuals in a situation where both of them believe that they have been heard
2. Examining disagreements to see if there is a way of solving them
3. Choosing alternatives that meet both of their needs.

Both individuals must leave the mediation session as if they are winners. They will then invest the time and energy in making the solution work. If people leave mediation thinking that they did not win or are in a position of disadvantage, sabotage of the agreed-upon solution is inevitable. The conflict will continue and may even escalate.

Other peer mediation benefits include a reduction in violence and acts of crime in schools using them, reduction in counselor and administrator time in dealing with student discord, enhanced self-esteem, improved attendance, and development of leadership and problem-solving skills on the part of students. These claims are supported by self-report and correlational data (Benson & Benson, 1993; Curona & Guerin, 1994, as cited in Gerber, 1999).

Without peer mediators for assistance, teachers would have to take time off from teaching to facilitate the problem-solving process themselves. The mediation process
averages 15 minutes for student mediators and, if used in some form by teachers, would require at least 10 minutes to allow each disputant to tell his or her side of the story, identify the problem, and come to an agreement on solutions. Thus, increases in win/win outcomes at a school without some form of peer mediation could come at the expense of additional time off from teaching (Hart & Gunty, 1997).

Peer mediation promotes a sense of safety and supportive environment where students can risk expressing their feelings as opposed to displaying aggressive behaviors. Mediation can also break language barriers, as bilingual mediators supply language skills that staff may lack and learned communication skills can be used in other situations at school and at home (Angaran & Beckwith, 1999a).

School administrators report that peer mediation reduces referrals to the principal’s office, disciplinary actions, and student fights (Opffer, 1997). Lane and McWhirter (1992) found:

‘In one Hawaii school, the number of on-campus fights dropped from 83 to 19 over a 2-year period’ (Araki, Takeshita, & Kadamoto, 1989). ‘At a New York school, these events declined by 50%’ (Koch, 1988). An Arizona school reported a 47% decrease in the average number of aggressive incidents per month (McCormick, 1988). Finally, ‘out of 69 mediated cases at a Milwaukee high school, 60 agreements were reached, and researchers recorded an 80% success rate for disputes mediated during the 1986-1987 school year’ (Burrell & Vogel, 1990). ‘As more instruments for program evaluation become available’ (Lam, 1989), the benefits to students and to school climate will become increasingly more apparent. (p. 24)

According to Lane and McWhirter (1992), program trainers in the Phoenix area serving more than 70 schools compiled a list of the following benefits:

1. Pressure for staff members to be constant disciplinarians decreased

2. Staff time saved

3. Tension reduced
4. Overall improvement in school climate
5. Students' leadership skills developed
6. Student language skills enhanced
7. Academic improvement of mediators
8. Increased status among peers for mediators
9. Improved self-esteem for both mediators and disputants
10. Valuable problem-solving skills learned
11. Practice received in self-regulation
12. Improvement in self-discipline of mediators
13. More openness in sharing of feelings reported
14. Greater assumption of responsibility
15. Student needs are met more positively
16. Families report improved self-discipline at home
17. Families note better listening all around
18. Home conflicts resolved more effectively
19. In society, effects will be cumulative as more children learn positive ways to resolve conflict
20. Eventual reduction of violence hypothesized

**Peer Mediation Program Recommendations**

In training peer mediators, students should possess the following qualities:

1. They should be non-judgmental by not allowing personal judgement and biases to affect the mediation session.
2. They have to remain impartial and open-minded.

3. It is important that they be patient.

4. Above all they must maintain confidentiality, if this is not done the program is doomed to failure (Stomfay-Stitz, 1994, p. 8, as cited in Demere-Mitchell, 2000, p. 34).

A qualitative study conducted by Torma (2000) indicated that peer mediation trainers and advisors agreed that a peer mediator was someone who was intelligent, flexible, open-minded, and responsible. Peer mediators also reported that a peer mediator needed to enjoy helping others, be a good listener, and be open-minded when dealing with others.

Another study was conducted by Trela (2001) regarding peer mediation training and program participation among middle- and high-school students. Trela found that student mediators generally recognized the skills and abilities developed in mediation training and used in peer mediation, as the skills and abilities of leadership. Consequently, “peer mediation training and program participation highly influenced recognition of leadership ability, with the most significant contributor to high recognition of leadership ability found for student mediators with the highest level of training” (p. iii).

According to Schmidt et al. (1992), peer mediators should reflect the school population. Students may be selected through their peers and teacher recommendations, student volunteers, or through club or group recommendations. Academic standing should not be a criterion. Important skills include:

1. People skills

2. Leadership potential
3. Respect of peers or ability to gain respect
4. Good verbal skills
5. Good listening skills
6. Willingness to stay with the program for the school year
7. Ability to honor confidentiality (p. iii).

Wheeler (1995) found that criteria for selection of students as peer mediators include students who:

1. Volunteer to be trained
2. Are good role models
3. Represent a cross-section of the cultural makeup of the student body
4. Are able to learn the strategies of mediation and help facilitate disputants through the process
5. Possess good leadership abilities (p. 34). Other suggested variables for peer mediation selection include grade level, gender, race, socioeconomic status, and placement in special programs, including students at risk for behavior problems, in an effort to represent the entire school body (Daunic et al., 2000).

Morse and Andrea (1994) found that, based on the experience of getting programs off the ground in a number of schools, the following keys are essential for program success:

1. Administrative support. No program will be successful without active participation and involvement of the principal. Prior to establishing the program, the principal should be oriented to the purpose of the program and involved, at some level, in all aspects of program implementation.
2. **Selection of students and staff.** Since students in conflict will be more comfortable relating to others they view as peers, students to be trained should be selected from a cross-section of the school community. Qualities associated with success as a peer mediator are willingness to learn, good verbal skills, and having the respect of peers. Regarding staff selection, one individual should be assigned to coordinate and lead the program, attend training with the students, develop procedures that make the program workable, and coordinate ongoing training for peer mediators.

3. **Working in pairs.** Two mediators should be assigned to each mediation. Particularly at the beginning, this provides student mediators with a degree of confidence, knowing a fellow mediator is there for support.

4. **Selling the program.** Even before training begins, provide in-service for all staff on purposes of the program and how it can benefit the school community. This allows staff input into program training and enables identification of staff who may be interested in assisting with implementation. After initial training, peer mediators themselves are often the best means of selling the program. Selected peer mediators might make presentations to faculty and parent groups, or visit individual classrooms to explain the program and what students might expect.

5. **Maintaining the program.** Once students, staff, and parents have had training about the program and how it can benefit the school community, an ongoing program of training, supervision, and evaluation must be developed. Training might consist of periodic meetings in which peer mediators get together with the faculty supervisor to refresh skills and discuss problems from mediation sessions. Supervision might consist
of a faculty supervisor sitting in during mediation sessions to determine if additional training or supervision is needed (p. 55).

Evaluation procedures should be built into the program. Before leaving a mediation, each participant should be asked to evaluate the session in terms of whether agreement was reached, whether the session was conducted fairly, and—even if agreement was not reached—whether a better understanding of the issues was achieved (Morse & Andrea, 1994).

In examining perspectives and experiences of mediators, Humphries (1999) found that conflict managers felt that they improved the school by resolving problems for peers, making the playground safer and keeping student problems under control. The three most commonly occurring playground problems that mediators tried to address, as recorded through the observations, were fighting (50%), name calling (17%), and swearing at peers (15%). The children suggested that part of the training should occur on the playground so that they could get a more realistic feel for the procedure. They also indicated that mediation plays an important role in helping others resolve disputes and improving the school climate.

The study concluded that emphasis should be placed on teaching mediators the process so that they can remember and carry out the steps beyond the training environment, which may promote a greater opportunity for children to refine and improve their skills. Also, in helping to increase the mediators’ use of the dispute resolution steps, it is beneficial for mediators to carry an outline of the mediation process when on duty so they can check that they have not missed any steps. It is noted that some students omitted the mediation step involving the discussion of the disputants’ feelings.
This finding is consistent with that of Johnson et al. (1992), who reported that elementary school mediators found it difficult to master skills involving the expression of feelings. Additionally, changes to improve the training program, as suggested by the mediators, may include the use of more realistic scenarios during training (Humphries, 1999).

Administrators and teachers should plan to evaluate the peer mediation program implemented in their school, knowing that when evaluating peer mediators, it is not necessary to have an exact replication of the mediation model, as students should, and will, personalize their approaches to mediation (Six & Marlor, 1996). Peer mediation programs are vital to prevent violence in the schools and to promote effective conflict resolution skills, which are lifelong learning skills. "To be most effective, peer mediation should be part of a whole school. Teachers, administrators, and other staff need to understand and support the goals and processes of such a program" (Peterson & Skiba, 2000, p. 130). Opffer (1997) also contends that without school-wide support, the program cannot be as effective because of the lack of consistency and modeling by a significant number of adults.

Angaran and Beckwith (1999a) suggest that the success to a peer mediation program is to (1) "start early" in an effort to prepare for middle school and to know how to utilize mediation; (2) "teach problem solving skills" to all students; (3) make mediation a part of a comprehensive program; (4) model mediation skills; and (5) involve the community. Careful consideration should always be used when establishing any peer mediation program within the school.
Summary

Conflict is a natural and normal part of life, but the severity and frequency of destructively managed conflicts leading to physical and verbal violence seems to be increasing in schools (Stop the Violence, 1994, as cited in Johnson & Johnson, 1996a). Conflict resolution teaches students to use alternatives to violence when resolving their interpersonal and personal problems.

Instruction in conflict resolution is typically presented in conjunction with a classroom or school-wide peer-mediation program (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). Teaching students problem-solving skills through a school-wide conflict resolution program that includes peer mediation can help students resolve the inevitable conflicts they encounter in the school environment (Daunic et al., 2000).

Given the increased attention to school violence and conflict, the review of the literature indicates that numerous schools are implementing peer mediation as a violence prevention program. Some of the benefits include reduction in violence and acts of crime in schools using them, reduction in counselor and administrator time in dealing with student discord, enhanced self-esteem, improved attendance, and development of leadership and problem-solving skills on the part of students. These claims are supported by self-report and correlational data (Benson & Benson, 1993; Curona & Guerin, 1994, as cited in Gerber, 1999).

Some of the literature also shows that in training peer mediators, students should possess skills in being non-judgmental, maintaining confidentiality, impartial and open-minded, and patient (Stomfay-Stitz, 1994, p. 8, as cited in Demere-Mitchell, 2000, p. 34). The peer mediator should also possess other important skills such as people skills,
leadership potential, respectfulness toward others, good verbal skills, good listening skills, commitment to the program for the school year, and ability to honor confidentiality Schmidt et al. (1992). Other suggested variables for peer mediation selection include grade level, gender, race, socioeconomic status, and placement in special programs, including students at risk for behavior problems, in an effort to represent the entire school body (Daunic et al., 2000).

Essential characteristics for program success include administrative support, selection of students and staff, peer mediators working in pairs, selling the program, maintaining the program, and having evaluation procedures (Morse & Andrea, 1994). Other recommendations include providing training on the playground, allowing peer mediators to carry an outline of the mediation process, starting a comprehensive program in the earlier grades, teaching problem solving to all students, modeling mediation skills, and involving the community (Humphries, 1999).
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the fourth- through sixth-grade students' perception of the attributes of peer mediators. Research questions explored in this study consist of (1) What is the peacemaker's perception of his or her attributes in a peer mediation program? (2) What is the disputant's perception of the peacemaker's attributes in a peer mediation program? and (3) What are the implications for program improvement? These questions were asked because predictive information is helpful for future selection and training of peer mediators. This chapter presents the methodology, rationale, participant selection, site selection, peer mediation procedures, question selection, data collection, data analysis procedures, and methods for verification.

Qualitative methods were utilized for data collection to determine the students' perception regarding attributes of peer mediators. Eisner's (1998) ultimate aim of qualitative inquiry is "to contribute to the improvement of education" (p. 2). He explains: "Description enables readers to visualize what a place or process is like. It should help them see the school or classroom the critic is attempting to help them understand" (p. 89).

The specific techniques applied in this study include (1) focus groups, (2) peacemaker questionnaires, and (3) disputant questionnaires, to provide a strong qualitative methodological approach. Consideration was given to the concept of using individual personal interviews; however, the decision was made to refrain from personal
interviews in order to promote a dialogue and comfortable climate for participants with similar backgrounds, during focus groups.

**Rationale for a Qualitative Design**

To support the evaluation of a student’s perception regarding the attributes of peer mediators, a qualitative methodological approach suggested an appropriate mode of inquiry. A qualitative design provides students a chance to express their feelings to promote insight from their perspective. Eisner (1998) contends that qualitative inquiry, in relation to schools and classrooms, can provide the “double advantage” of learning about schools and classrooms in ways that are useful for understanding other schools (p. 12).

According to Rubin and Babbie (1997), qualitative methods emphasize depth of understanding and the deeper meanings of experience (as cited in Rosenthal, 2001). Researchers utilizing the qualitative perspective seek to understand well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable contexts. With qualitative data, researchers can see which events lead to which consequences, and derive significant explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

“Evaluators using qualitative methods strive to understand programs and situations as a whole. The evaluator searches for the totality—the unifying nature of particular settings. This holistic approach assumes that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (Patton, 1987, p. 17).

Qualitative research and validity lie in the intense involvement between researcher and subject. “Because the moderator can challenge and probe for the most truthful responses, supporters claim, qualitative research can yield a more in-depth
analysis than that produced by formal quantitative methods" (Mariampolski, 1984, p. 21, as cited in Krueger, 1988, p. 40).

Qualitative researchers are also more likely to select a purposive sample of people believed to be a key in terms of social dynamics, leadership, etc. (Patten, 2000). With a purposive sample, the researcher intentionally draws what he or she believes to be an appropriate sample for the research problem (Pyrczak, 1999).

**Participant Selection**

I selected participants using a purposive sample. Therefore, this study includes students in Grades 4 through 6, who were peacemakers and disputants enrolled in one of all four elementary schools of the Pinconning Area School District. All four elementary schools are predominately Caucasian, low-middle class, rural schools.

**Site Selection**

A proposal that included specific research procedures and informed consent (see Appendix A) was submitted to the superintendent of the Pinconning Area School District. Written approval was obtained from the superintendent to authorize the project (see Appendix A).

Data were collected from four rural elementary schools in the Pinconning Area School District. The four schools were Pinconning Central Elementary, Garfield-Fraser Elementary, Linwood Elementary, and Mt. Forest Elementary. At each elementary school a focus group was conducted, and peacemaker and disputant questionnaires were collected and reviewed.
The Pinconning Area School District site was selected because all four of the elementary schools within the school district have ongoing peer mediation programs in operation, with a history of administrative and community support. The selected peer mediation program began in 1997 as a pilot program for the district, and received a certificate of recognition as a violence prevention program in 1999 by the Bay County Prevention Network. Report records (see Appendix B) that were collected within the district, from Grades 4 through 6 for the 2000-2001 school year, showed that the majority of conflicts in all four schools included fighting, pushing, and name-calling.

**Peer Mediation Procedures**

The Pinconning Area School District in Pinconning, Michigan, utilizes a modified peer mediation program of Peace Works, developed by the Peace Education Foundation mediation program of Miami, Florida (Schmidt et al., 1992). Mediators are called peacemakers and are chosen as peacemakers after completing an application similar to a job application, along with references and successful completion of training. Training emphasizes factors associated with understanding conflict, listening, communication skills, and several role-plays.

When peacemakers initiate their services, they introduce themselves and offer their help. A structured format with set ground rules is used, and everyone must allow each other to speak without interruption, name-calling, or put-downs. Each disputant then tells his or her side of the story and brainstorms possible solutions. Peacemakers reflect and restate content throughout the process, as well as restate and check solutions for accuracy.
Peacemakers carry peacemaker note pads with the words "TELL –THINK – CHOOSE –DO" written on the pad, as an outline guide to assist with remembering their role. Developmental stages should be taken into account both when training student mediators and when implementing a school-based mediation program.

According to Sticher (1986), it is recommended to use simple words and concrete methods of communicating the points of mediation to younger students (as cited in Shulman, 1996). This coincides with the following process utilized by the Pinconning Area School District:

1. Introduction
   a. The peacemaker introduces self as a peacemaker: "Hi, our names are ____________ and we are peacemakers."
   b. The peacemaker asks the disputants if they would like help solving their problem: "Would you like help solving your problem?" If no, the peacemaker informs the disputant of their availability if needed or refers the disputants to an adult and the session is over. If yes, the peacemaker moves the disputants to a private area to talk.
   c. The peacemaker asks the disputants for their names: "What are your names?"

2. Ground Rules
   a. The peacemaker states the four mediation rules: "There are 4 rules you must agree to before we begin. They are: (1) be willing to solve the problem, (2) be honest, (3) be willing to listen without interrupting and (4) be respectful—No put-downs."
b. Peacemaker asks for agreement with rules: "Do you agree to these rules?"

If yes, the mediation session continues. If no, the mediation session ends.

3. Tell the problem
   a. Each peacemaker asks a disputant to tell what happened and how they feel, restating the situation: "Could you TELL your side of the story and how you feel?"

4. Think of a solution
   a. Each peacemaker asks a disputant what he or she thinks would be a good solution, restating the disputant's idea: "What do you THINK would be a good solution to this problem?"

5. Choose a solution
   a. Each peacemaker asks a disputant what he or she thinks would be the best solution they both could agree on and restates the solution: "What do you think would be the best solution you can both CHOOSE to agree on?"

6. Do the solution
   a. Each peacemaker gets an agreement from the disputant, restating the solution: "Do you think you can DO your part of the solution?"

7. Closing
   a. Each peacemaker congratulates the disputants for solving his or her problem: "Congratulations for solving this problem."
Following the peacemaker's duty, the peacemaker completes the peacemaker report slip, which is returned to the office and tallied for monitoring. The peacemaker report slip consists of a checklist that identifies the conflict and whether or not the problem was solved. This process helps to evaluate the kind of problems that occur on the playground and examines the quantity of problems.

Peacemakers wear t-shirts with a peace logo to identify themselves as mediators and they are assigned to recess duty in pairs. Mandatory monthly meetings are held to discuss questions and concerns related to the peer mediation process, as well as success stories. Peacemakers may also have the option of serving duty in the morning to create a peaceful school climate as students, staff, and parents enter the building.

**Question Selection**

Open-ended questions were utilized in the focus groups and questionnaires, which permitted the student to respond in his or her terms (see Appendix B). "The purpose of gathering responses to open-ended questions is to permit the evaluator to understand and capture the perspective of program participants without predetermining their perspective through prior selection of questionnaire categories" (Patton, 1987, p. 11).

Non-controversial introductory questions were used to promote a non-threatening climate, preceding more explicit questions. An interview flip-chart guide of questions was used in the focus groups, which presented numerical, consistent, and specific wording to prevent a representation of bias. I chose the interview guide approach in an effort to ask the same questions to each peacemaker who participated in the focus group.

Questions are primarily divided into two classes: those that ask about behavior or facts and those that ask about psychological states or attitudes. Behavioral and factual
questions were utilized in this study to ask about characteristics of people, things people have done, or things that have happened to them which can be verifiable by an external observer. For behavior, validity has an intuitive meaning, due to the value that would be agreed on by several external observers observing the same event (Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). According to Patton (1987), to promote relevancy when conducting a study, the content of interviews and the type of questions to ask should be aimed at eliciting descriptions of experiences, behaviors, actions, and activities that would have been observable had the observer been present.

**Data Collection**

**Focus Groups**

The first method of data collection included the use of a focus group. A focus group can be defined as a carefully planned discussion designed to acquire perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment (Krueger, 1988). Focus groups typically include characteristics which may feature people (usually 5 to 10) who possess certain characteristics and provide qualitative data in a focused discussion, to help understand the topic of interest (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Focus group research is scientific research because it is a process of disciplined inquiry that is systematic and verifiable. It is not the type of scientific research that seeks to control and predict, but it is the type that seeks to provide understanding and insight. "Focus groups are valid if they are used carefully for a problem that is suitable for focus group inquiry" (Krueger, 1988, p. 41).

This study sought to obtain perceptions of people on a complex topic. The primary way to study this was to obtain an in-depth perception of participants and the
results needed to take on a descriptive style. Therefore, the intent in this study was to observe, listen, document, and report the perceptions of the target audience (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

According to Stewart and Shamdasani (1990), an important aspect of focus group moderation is developing an understanding of the sources and nature of biases that can affect the validity of focus group data. Three different sources of bias threaten moderator objectivity, which includes personal bias, unconscious needs to "please the client," and the need for consistency (Kennedy, 1976, as cited in Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

In regard to the moderator's background and relationship to the participants affecting personal decisions, Morgan (1997) believes the issues lie with how the participants will perceive the moderator. Thus, will they think he or she is open to hearing a wide range of opinions and experiences, or will they perceive the moderator as having a hidden agenda? Morgan additionally contends that when a lack of either experience or neutrality means that you cannot use your own staff as moderators, it is necessary to bring in someone from the outside. Krueger (1997) states,

An advantage of using staff members as moderators is their familiarity with the organization, its history, and its culture. . . . This familiarity, however, can also be a disadvantage in situations where traditions are not examined critically and assumptions are made that limit the study. The continual challenge to internal investigators is to get attuned to the assumptions and limits that they often unconsciously embrace. The first step is to be aware of this potential limitation. This effect can be minimized by developing a team of researchers and drawing on their insights. (p. 39)

Focus group moderators are diverse and can include different types of people with varied backgrounds, which may include professional moderators, part-time moderators, academicians, marketing consultants, clients, and psychologists or psychiatrists. There are advantages and disadvantages with various moderators. "The most important guiding
principle relating to the ethics between the client and the moderator is one of mutual trust. The client must have complete trust of the moderator, and the same must exist in return” (Greenbaum, 1988, p. 144). “Focus group research conducted among children (ages 6-13 years) requires very different skills and moderator personalities from those conducting adult groups and therefore should be conducted by people who specialize in this segment of the profession” (Greenbaum, 1988, p. ix).

Given the research on focus group moderation, this study consisted of group facilitation by the researcher and a school social worker who holds a Master’s degree in social work. The school social worker and I hold over 10 years of group facilitation experience, maintenance of neutrality and non-judgment, specialization with working with children, familiarity with the topic, and an established trusting relationship.

**Focus Group Procedures**

I solicited peacemaker focus group participants by providing a verbal explanation regarding the study to all of the peacemakers who were present on a peacemaker field trip. This included an explanation regarding the purpose of the focus group, the focus group process, and when and where the focus group would meet.

I also provided an informational letter and informed consent (see Appendix A) for each peacemaker to take home, with an explanation that the only criteria for a peacemaker to participate in the focus group was that he or she return the consent form signed by their parent. These methods were utilized 1 week prior to the focus group.

Of 84 peacemakers district-wide, 24 peacemakers returned an informed consent to participate in the focus group. Peacemakers who returned their signed consent letter were individually briefed regarding the purpose of the focus group, the focus group process,
and when and where the focus group would meet. Peacemakers who did not return the informed consent were excluded from the focus group.

Peacemakers who agreed to participate and returned the informed consent received a reminder prior to the day of the focus group. Upon the onset of the group, students were re-informed regarding the purpose of the study. The principles of confidentiality were also discussed, as well as the fact that there would be no identifiers connected to their responses. After these initial introductions, the questions were administered to the participants in a systematic fashion.

Peacemakers were involved in focus groups, which were held in their own elementary school in the Pinconning Area School District and conducted by myself and a school social worker who holds a Master’s degree in social work. The focus groups were conducted during the end of the school year to provide participants with the opportunity to provide information based on their experiences throughout the school year. Each focus group met one time for approximately 1 hour, and consisted of a maximum of seven participants. Student identities were kept anonymous and identified by a number to protect the confidentiality of their responses.

The focus groups met in a small office located in close proximity to the main office of each school. The capacity of the group room was approximately eight students and two adults. Each office was adequately lit with natural and incandescent lighting. The offices were also equipped with two audiocassettes to permit audio recording.

Table 1 presents demographic data of the focus group participants. All participants in the focus groups were Caucasian.
### TABLE 1

PINCONNING AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Garfield-Fraser</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linwood</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Participant 3</td>
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<td>Participant 4</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mt. Forest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N=24.*

The data consisted of transcript narratives taken from audiotaped interviews and researcher field notes. Eisner (1998) indicates that the use of note-taking and, at times, tape recordings is crucial in conducting qualitative research, as “they provide the reminders, the quotations, the details that make for credible description and convincing interpretation” (p. 188).
I attempted to solicit disputant focus group participants by reviewing disputant names identified in peacemaker report records (see Appendix B). After disputants were identified, they were gathered either individually or by group in the school library or school social work office, where an explanation was given regarding the purpose of the focus group, the focus group process, and when and where the focus group would meet. I also provided an informational letter and informed consent (see Appendix A) to each disputant with an explanation that the only criteria for disputants to participate in a focus group was that they return the consent form signed by their parent. These methods were utilized 1 week prior to the focus group meeting.

Two schools returned no informed consents, one school returned three, and one school returned two. Further attempts were made to meet with disputants to collect more consents, however no additional consents were attained. Thus, a disputant focus group was not conducted due to the low number of disputants who returned consent forms in each school.

**Questionnaire**

A second method of data collection included the use of a questionnaire with open-ended questions, to gather a broader range of data than what could be collected from the sole use of focus groups (see Appendix B). The questionnaire was utilized to collect data regarding characteristics, experiences, and opinions and to allow participants an opportunity to express themselves without having concern about their individual responses being heard by others.
Questionnaire Procedures

All students in Grades 4 through 6 were given a peacemaker program questionnaire by their classroom teacher at the end of the school year. The questionnaires were distributed at the end of the school year to provide participants with the opportunity to provide information based on his or her experiences throughout the school year. The questionnaires were completed in the students’ classroom, with natural and incandescent lighting.

Of 345 peacemaker program questionnaires distributed to all of the district’s students in Grades 4 through 6, 74 questionnaires were returned from peacemakers and 79 questionnaires were returned from disputants. Therefore, a total of 153 participants completed the questionnaire. Larger schools and larger peacemaker programs reflect a greater number of returned questionnaires.

Table 2 presents the participants of each school who completed the written questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Peacemakers</th>
<th>Disputants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pinconning Central</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt. Forest</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linwood</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garfield-Fraser</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students were asked to give their feedback regarding their experience with the peacemaker program, for the purpose of program improvement. If students did not have
any experience with the peacemaker program, they had the opportunity to indicate so on their questionnaire, thus excluding them from being a participant in the study. After each student completed his or her questionnaire, the classroom teacher collected the questionnaire to deliver to me.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Qualitative data analysis is a process of bringing order, structure, and meaning out of the extensive collection of data (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Eisner (1998) additionally contends that

> the formulation of themes within an educational criticism means identifying the recurring messages that pervade the situation about which the critic writes. Themes are the dominant features of the situation or person, those qualities of place, person, or object that define or describe identity. (p. 104)

Eisner (1998) suggests that “in seeking structural corroboration we look for recurrent behaviors or actions, those theme-like features of a situation that inspire confidence that the events interpreted and appraised are not aberrant or exceptional, but rather characteristic of the situation” (p. 110).

Content analysis consists of identifying coherent and important examples, themes, and patterns in the data. “The basic procedure in content analysis is to design categories that are relevant to the research purpose and to sort all occurrences of relevant words or other recording units into these categories” (Tesch, 1990, p. 79). The analyst looks for quotations or observations that coincide with each other and are examples of the same underlying idea, issue, or concept, which sometimes involves pulling together all the data that address a particular evaluation question. After the data are collected, the information is subdivided into categories, patterns, and themes (Patton, 1987). The frequency of
occurrences in each category should be counted to enable certain conclusions to be drawn (Tesch, 1990).

Guba (as cited in Patton, 1987) correspondingly contends that the evaluator-analyst looks for recurrence in the data which can be sorted into categories. The categories should then be judged by data that hold together or “dovetail” in a meaningful way and the extent to which differences among categories are bold and clear. These methods were consistent with those used when conducting this study. While this study was designed to examine the students’ perception of their experience with peer mediation, the following procedures were used integrating organizational methods based on the Developmental Research Sequence (Spradley, 1979).

**Audiotape**

1. Each focus group was audiotaped using two tape recorders, in the event that one tape recorder did not work.

2. Each focus group participant was identified by a code, for the purpose of distinguishing who was responsible for which statement. For example (P2) indicates a statement made by participant number 2.

3. A transcriptionist was employed to transcribe and print the audiotapes.

**Transcripts**

1. A school social worker and I reviewed transcripts, to assist the researchers’ decision-making process for text analysis.

2. A school social worker and I read and re-read transcribed data for commonalities and differences.
3. Individual statements that contained one idea, episode, or piece of information were analyzed and given a coded theme word, based on some pattern or commonality.

4. Frequencies of the coded themes were compiled and tabulated to monitor occurrences.

5. The tabulated themes were highlighted into major themes.

6. A school social worker and I completed an audit, which compared the raw text from the focus group transcripts, questionnaire, idea segments, and themes for consistency. The audit resulted in highlighting the major themes and concluding the data analysis procedure.

**Methods for Verification**

Qualitative researchers utilize various steps to ensure the results can persuade audiences that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) address four terms, *credibility, transferability, dependability*, and *confirmability*, as being the naturalist’s equivalents for the conventional terms *internal validity, external validity, reliability*, and *objectivity*.

In the present study, measures were taken to promote the true value of the findings to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Merriam (1988) also suggests that trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, and consistency are enhanced through member checks, triangulation, audit trail, and an explanation regarding researcher biases.
Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest five major techniques to promote credibility findings and interpretations. These techniques include: (1) activities increasing the probability that credible findings will be produced, i.e., prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation; (2) activity that provides an external check on the inquiry process, i.e., peer debriefing; (3) activity aimed at refining working hypotheses as more and more information becomes available; (4) activity that makes possible checking preliminary findings and interpretations against raw data; and (5) activity providing for the direct test of findings and interpretations with the human sources, i.e., member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I used various methods to ensure credibility. First, I maintained prolonged engagement with the data, the site, and the participants. I also used triangulation of data sources (questionnaire, document collection, audiotapes, transcripts, and observer notes) to support credibility of the findings. Triangulation is a process using multiple sources of data or multiple methods to confirm emerging findings.

Patton (1987) describes triangulation as “a powerful solution to the problem of relying too much on any single data source or method and thereby undermining the validity and credibility of findings because of the weaknesses of any single method” (p. 61). Jick (1983) also purports that triangulation rests on the premise that the weaknesses in each single method will be compensated by the counterbalancing strengths of another (as cited in Torma, 2000).

Second, I was involved in every aspect of the focus groups and facilitating the questionnaire. Consequently, I engaged in continual peer debriefing with another school
social worker skilled in peer mediation, as a disinterested peer’s point of view promotes honesty, non-bias, and credibility.

Third, I used member checks to ask for clarification during focus groups, to ensure that the perception of the participants was adequately and accurately represented.

**Transferability**

Transferability coincides with external validity in quantitative methodology. External validity refers to the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Merriam, 1988). Patton indicates that qualitative research should “provide perspective” (as cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 175) as opposed to identifying truths reflective of a vast number of individuals. Thus, participants in this study were able to provide an accurate perspective of their experiences and beliefs associated with peer mediation.

I used three measures to address trustworthiness. First, I provided a clear definition of the purposive sampling methods for soliciting participants. Second, a description of the participants’ characteristics provided an outline for the reader, to enable the reader to make judgments regarding the appropriateness of results to other contexts. Third, questions were presented numerically and consistently with specific wording. Since the questions were systematic, researcher judgment during the focus group is reduced, preventing a representation of bias.

**Dependability**

Dependability, which is concerned with consistency or stability, was established through three primary methods: (1) triangulation, (2) audit trail, and (3) dependability.
audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I established triangulation through multiple data sources (questionnaire, document collection, audiotapes, transcripts, and observer notes). The audit trail consisted of maintaining a continual audit, primarily focusing on day-to-day decisions as the study progressed, as well as an organized research notebook of data collected. Given the method of inquiry, the audit served as a method to track the project development through the analysis and write-up phases. Last, another school social worker skilled in peer mediation examined interpretations, methods, and conclusions related to the study to ensure maintenance of fairness, consistency, and procedural rationale.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to neutrality or objectivity in quantitative methods. This consists of ensuring that all data can be tracked to their original source and the logic used to determine interpretations is explicitly stated (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Various methods were utilized to address this indicator. First, viewpoints were exposed and commonalties were emphasized. According to Tesch (1990), "establishing relationships is commonly considered by researchers to be the first step in theory-building" (p. 84). Second, the audit demonstrates the logic used in analysis. Third, the document was examined in its entirety to verify that the interpretations made represented the data. I looked at the data line by line for 'empirical indicators,' which consist of "behavioral actions and events, observed and described in documents and in the words of interviewees and informants" (Tesch, 1990, p. 85).
Role of the Researcher

In quantitative research, "the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 1988, p. 52). Merriam (1988) addresses tolerance for ambiguity, good communication skills, and sensitivity to context, data, and personal bias, as characteristics needed by the researcher as the primary instrument.

I am a 35-year-old Caucasian female who holds a Master’s degree in social work, with specialization in school social work. I obtained full-time employment as a medical social worker for 5 years, then worked as a full-time school social worker for 5 years. Through the course of employment and education, I had involvement facilitating groups for 10 years.

I followed detailed methods to establish trustworthiness. This involved ensuring that the interpretations established represented the experience of the participants. In the present study, I was involved in all phases of data collection including design, participant selection, and all focus group discussions. As the primary instrument for data collection, I was objective and refrained from interjecting bias into the study. Consequently, a school social worker and I conducted an audit. Ethical considerations included maintaining confidentiality of participants.

This project evolved from my interest in improving peer mediation within the Pinconning Area School District. I recognized the following assumptions prior to beginning the exploratory evaluation. These assumptions developed through my experience as a school social worker and participant in the site under study.
1. The study of peer mediation within a public elementary school is a legitimate field of study.

2. There is increased attention regarding school violence and the need for violence prevention programs.

3. Qualitative research is an appropriate methodology for this study.

4. One cannot assume a student’s perception without in-depth investigation.

5. As students are the individuals involved in peer mediation, they can provide valuable evaluations of the services they receive.

6. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, qualitative methodologies are most appropriate.

7. Having the researcher as the primary tool of investigation permits flexibility and responsiveness to participants, capturing a more in-depth-assessment of their experience.

8. Students may provide information that questions the process of peer mediation suggesting potential changes.

9. Researchers should first engage in exploratory research before confirmatory research.

10. Schools should be proactive in terms of utilizing violence prevention programs as a means of intervening before crises escalate.
CHAPTER 4

OUTCOME OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the fourth- through sixth-grade students’ perception of the attributes of peer mediators. Research questions that pertain to peer mediators’ attributes consist of (1) What is the peacemaker’s perception of his or her attributes in an elementary peer mediation program? (2) What is the disputant’s perception of the peacemaker’s attributes in an elementary peer mediation program? and (3) What are the implications for program improvement? This chapter presents the data findings obtained from focus groups and questionnaires, as they relate to the research questions presented in the study.

Findings

In this study, a total of 24 peacemakers in Grades 4 through 6 participated in focus groups, while 153 peacemakers and disputants (74 peacemakers and 79 disputants) from Grades 4 through 6 participated in responding to a questionnaire, in order to find out their thoughts and feelings regarding peacemaker attributes.

Data from the focus groups (see Appendix C) and questionnaires consisted of direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge of human interactions that were part of their peer mediation program experiences. A school social worker and I analyzed the text from the focus groups and questionnaires by taking individual statements that contained one idea, episode, or piece of information and
given a coded theme word based on some pattern or commonality. Frequencies of the
coded themes were compiled and tabulated to monitor occurrences. The tabulated
themes were then highlighted into major themes, concluding the data analysis procedures.

Focus Group Data

The following focus group questions were used to answer research question 1:
What is the peacemaker’s perception of his or her attributes in an elementary peer
mediation program?

1. What do you like most about being a peacemaker?
2. What type of words does a good peacemaker use?
3. What kind of characteristics would make someone peacemaker of the year?
4. What worked well between you and your disputant?

Additional focus group questions were used to answer research question 3: What
are the implications for program improvement?

4. What can a peacemaker do to make the peacemaker program work?
6. What was difficult or didn’t work well when working with a disputant?
9. What do you dislike most about being a peacemaker?

10. What suggestions do you have to improve the peacemaker program?

Research question 1: What is the peacemaker’s perception of his or her attributes in
an elementary peer mediation program?

To answer this research question, focus group participants revealed the following:

1. Peacemakers concluded that an appreciation or desire to help solve
problems for themselves as well as others is an important attribute for peer mediators.

Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:
“You are not a cop, you are just trying to help them solve the conflict.”
“Helping people solve their problems on the playground.”
“We can help solve problems and make peace.”
“You learn how to deal with problems besides violence.”

2. Peacemakers indicated that an ability to present themselves in a kind and polite manner is a significant attribute for peer mediators. In terms of the meaning of kind, kind refers to friendly, nice, gentle, and considerate. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

“Use nice and kind words so that the person you are listening to doesn’t get mad.”
“Use like friendly words, not mean, nasty words.”
“Not words like ‘shut up’ and ‘stupid thing’, kind words like ‘please don’t interrupt.’”

3. Peacemakers revealed that responsibility and commitment to the peacemaker program is a valuable attribute for peer mediators. Perspectives consisted of the importance of consistently fulfilling peacemaker duty assignment and following the peacemaker’s procedures and rules. Using kind and polite manners was also emphasized. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

“When people take out their time from recess to help another person or maybe their peacemaker partner is absent or something.”

“Someone who is always on duty and willing to help other people with problems and they are out in the hallway everyday and even if somebody doesn’t have a partner, they are willing to go out and go on duty.”

“Be kind and not give up.”
4. Peacemakers reported that providing good verbal and non-verbal communication skills (including good listening skills) and exhibition of kindness, are worthy attributes for peer mediators. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

"Soothing words and really trying to help them out and being sincere with your words."

"Give each person the chance to tell you what they feel about the conflict."

"Listen to them."

"Be kind to them and they will be kind to you."

**Research question 3: What are the implications for program improvement?**

In responding to this research question, focus group participants stated the following:

1. Peacemakers concluded that peacemakers should be responsible and committed to the program, as well as be kind and polite. These two aspects will greatly improve any peer mediation program. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

"Peacemakers should try to remember when it is their turn to go out on the playground and not complain about it, like ‘I don’t feel like doing it today’."

"Be as polite as possible to the people."

2. Peacemakers indicated that uncooperative and non-serious disputants, as well as poor verbal and non-verbal communication from the disputant, are conditions that are not good for effective peer mediation. Consequently, the reverse of these conditions would improve the program. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:
“They didn’t cooperate and kept talking when we were talking.”

“They won’t listen to you when you are trying to resolve the conflict, they won’t talk to you because they are arguing.”

“Sometimes the disputant will not take the problem serious.”

3. Peacemakers revealed that not being teased by students, having a responsible partner, not having to be absent from class to perform as a peacemaker, and not having interruptions from bystanders during conflict resolution, are implications for program improvement. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

“I don’t like being teased by the kids. They are teasing me for something that is doing good.”

“When you are trying to solve a conflict, some people come up and interrupt and they don’t listen.”

“Sometimes the other peacemaker wants to play and not do the conflict.”

4. Peacemakers emphasized that peacemakers should be more kind and respectful to disputants and each other, peacemakers should gather more information from the disputant, and there should be more than one set of peacemakers working on the playground. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

“Be nicer to the people that you have to work with and other disputants.”

“We should get the two partners [peacemakers] to gather information and use it to help them solve the conflict.”

“Having two sets of peacemakers go out in one recess so one set doesn’t have to walk around the whole playground at a time.”
Questionnaire Data

The following inquiries were used in the questionnaires for peacemakers to answer research question 1: What is the peacemaker’s perception of his or her attributes in an elementary peer mediation program?

3. What do you like most about peacemakers?
4. What type of words does a good peacemaker use?
8. What kind of characteristics would make someone peacemaker of the year?
9. What can a peacemaker do to make the peacemaker program work well?
10. What type of things does a peacemaker do that works well or is the most helpful?

Additional inquiries were used for peacemakers to answer research question 3: What are the implications for program improvement?

9. What can a peacemaker do to make the peacemaker program work well?
10. What type of things does a peacemaker do that works well or is the most helpful?

11. What type of things does a peacemaker do that doesn’t work well or is unhelpful?

12. What suggestions do you have to improve the peacemaker program?

Research question 1: What is the peacemaker’s perception of his or her attributes in an elementary peer mediation program?

To answer this question, data were derived from the following inquiries:

3. What do you like most about peacemakers?
Peacemakers concluded that peacefully solving problems, and displaying kindness are important attributes for peer mediators. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

"Solving one problem at a time we improved our school."

"Peacemakers are very kind and considerate."

"I like to solve problems and make peace."

4. **What type of words does a good peacemaker use?**

Peacemakers indicated that being kind is a significant attribute for peer mediators. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

"Kind, understanding words."

"Kind, no put-downs."

"Kind, soothing words."

8. **What kind of characteristics would make someone peacemaker of the year?**

Peacemakers presented kindness, and responsibility as valuable attributes for peer mediators. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

"They would have to be kind to the people and go through problems respectfully."

"Doing extra duty, you could always count on them."

"Responsible."

9. **What can a peacemaker do to make the peacemaker program work well?**

Peacemakers reported that helping to solve problems, responsibility, and kindness are worthy attributes for peer mediators. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:
“Can always be on duty and responsible.”

“Try to solve problems appropriately.”

“Be nice to the disputant.”

10. **What type of things does a peacemaker do that works well or is the most helpful?**

Peacemakers concluded that helping to solve problems and using good verbal and non-verbal communication are important attributes for peer mediators. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

“All help people solve problems.”

“Listen to one person at a time.”

“Have disputants come up with a fitting solution.”

In response to research question 1: What is the peacemaker’s perception of his or her attributes in an elementary peer mediation program? Peacemakers concluded that helping to solve problems effectively, displaying kindness, demonstrating responsibility and commitment, and using effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills are essential attributes for peer mediators to possess.

**Research question 3: What are the implications for program improvement?**

Data were derived from peacemakers from the following questions listed in the questionnaire:

9. **What can a peacemaker do to make the peacemaker program work well?**

Peacemakers reported that helping to solve problems, responsibility, and kindness are implications for program improvement. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:
“Can always be on duty and responsible.”
“Try to solve problems appropriately.”
“Be nice to the disputant.”

10. **What type of things does a peacemaker do that works well or is the most helpful?**

Peacemakers concluded that helping to solve problems and using good verbal and non-verbal communication are implications for program improvement. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

“Help people solve problems.”
“Listen to one person at a time.”
“Have disputants come up with a fitting solution.”

11. **What type of things does a peacemaker do that doesn’t work or is unhelpful?**

Peacemakers indicated that poor communication, being unkind, irresponsible, and unfair, are conditions that are not good for effective peer mediation. Consequently, the reverse of these conditions would improve the program. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

“They interrupt and take sides.”
“They don’t work on the playground all of the time.”
“Being mean.”

12. **What suggestions do you have to improve the peacemaker program?**
Peacemakers emphasized that encouraging more responsible students to join peacemaking and providing more incentives and meetings are implications for program improvement. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

"Offer something that will get more people to join the peacemaker program."

"More meetings and rewards."

"We should have more peacemakers."

In response to research question 3: What are the implications for program improvement? peacemakers concluded that recruiting more peacemaker's who display kindness, demonstrate fairness, demonstrate responsibility and commitment to the program, and use effective communication and problem solving skills, are important attributes for the success of the peacemaker program. Peacemakers also concluded that providing more incentives and meetings for peacemakers, having two or more sets of peacemakers serve duty, having peacemakers gather more disputant information, and providing guidance and support to address uncooperative disputants, teasing from disputants, and absence from class to serve duty, are also implications for program improvement.

The following inquiries were used in the questionnaires for disputants to answer research question 2: What is the disputant’s perception of the peacemaker’s attributes in an elementary peer mediation program?

3. What do you like most about peacemakers?

4. What type of words does a good peacemaker use?

8. What kind of characteristics would make someone peacemaker of the year?

9. What can a peacemaker do to make the peacemaker program work well?
10. What type of things does a peacemaker do that works well or is the most helpful?

Additional inquiries were used for disputants to answer research question 3: What are the implications for program improvement?

9. What can a peacemaker do to make the peacemaker program work well?

10. What type of things does a peacemaker do that works well or is the most helpful?

11. What type of things does a peacemaker do that doesn’t work well or is unhelpful?

12. What suggestions do you have to improve the peacemaker program?

Research question 2: What is the disputant’s perception of the peacemaker’s attributes in an elementary peer mediation program?

3. What do you like most about peacemakers?

Disputants concluded that peacefully solving problems, and displaying kindness are important attributes for peer mediators. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

"I like that they [peacemakers] solve problems peacefully."

"I like that they listen to your story and share what you should do."

"They are nice and they help people."

4. What type of words does a good peacemaker use?

Disputants indicated that being kind is a significant attribute for peer mediators. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:
“Use kind words like ‘thanks for telling me that you were fighting’, ‘please be kind to others’, ‘thank you for telling your side of the story’.”

“Kind and doesn’t yell at people.”

“Nice and meaningful words.”

8. What kind of characteristics would make someone peacemaker of the year?

Disputants presented that kindness and helping to solve the most problems and/or the severest problem are valuable attributes for peer mediators. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

“Kind and considerate and always thinking of others’ feelings.”

“Solves a lot of problems.”

“Be on time.”

9. What can a peacemaker do to make the peacemaker program work well?

Disputants reported that kindness, responsibility, and helping to solve problems is worthy attributes for peer mediators. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

“Be nice.”

“Be on the playground on their day.”

“Help solve the problems more.”

10. What type of things does a peacemaker do that works well or is the most helpful?
Disputants concluded that helping to solve problems and using good verbal and non-verbal communication, fairness, and kindness are important attributes for peer mediators. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

"They help you solve your problem."

"Use kind words."

"Talking it out and not choosing sides."

In response to research question 2: What is the disputant’s perception of the peacemaker’s attributes in an elementary peer mediation program? disputants concluded that helping to solve problems effectively, displaying kindness, demonstrating responsibility and commitment, exhibiting fairness, and using effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills are important attributes for peer mediators to possess.

**Research question 3: What are the implications for program improvement?**

Data were derived from disputants from the following questions listed in the questionnaire:

9. **What can a peacemaker do to make the peacemaker program work well?**

Disputants reported that kindness, responsibility, and helping to solve problems is implications for program improvement. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

"Be nice."

"Be on the playground on their day."

"Help solve the problems more."

10. **What type of things does a peacemaker do that works well or is the most helpful?**
Disputants concluded that helping to solve problems, using good verbal and non-verbal communication, fairness, and kindness are implications for program improvement. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

"They help you solve your problem."

"Use kind words."

"Talking it out and not choosing sides."

11. **What type of things does a peacemaker do that doesn’t work or is unhelpful?**

Disputants indicated that poor verbal and non-verbal communication and peacemaker irresponsibility, are characteristics that are not good for effective peer mediation. Consequently, the opposite of these conditions would improve the program. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

"Doesn’t go on duty."

"Don’t listen."

"Talks too much."

12. **What suggestions do you have to improve the peacemaker program?**

Disputants emphasized that having responsible and committed peacemakers and encouraging more students to join as peacemakers are implications for program improvement. Some relevant statements include but are not limited to:

"I think more people should join."

"I suggest all peacemakers go on duty when it is their turn."

"They could have more peacemakers."
In response to research question 3: What are the implications for program improvement? disputants concluded that recruiting more peacemakers who display kindness, demonstrate fairness, demonstrate responsibility and commitment to the program, and using effective communication and problem solving skills, are important attributes for the success of the peacemaker program.

Table 3 presents comparable peacemaker-disputant data.

**TABLE 3**

**PEACEMAKER-DISPUTANT COMPARABLE FINDINGS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Peacemaker Perception</th>
<th>Disputant Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attributes</td>
<td>Effective problem solver</td>
<td>Effective problem solver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacemaker Perception</td>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>Kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRIBUTES</td>
<td>Responsible and committed</td>
<td>Responsible and committed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>Effective communicator</td>
<td>Effective communicator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>Effective problem solver</td>
<td>Effective problem solver</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>Recruit more peacemakers:</td>
<td>Recruit more peacemakers:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>Kind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>Responsible and committed</td>
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<td>Effective problem solver</td>
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<td>Implications</td>
<td>Effective communicator</td>
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<td>Implications</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Fair</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>Provide more incentives and meetings for peacemakers</td>
<td>Provide more incentives and meetings for peacemakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>Have two or more sets of peacemakers serve duty</td>
<td>Have two or more sets of peacemakers serve duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>Have peacemakers gather more disputant information</td>
<td>Have peacemakers gather more disputant information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>Provide guidance and support:</td>
<td>Provide guidance and support:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>Uncooperative disputants</td>
<td>Uncooperative disputants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>Teasing</td>
<td>Teasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>Absence from class</td>
<td>Absence from class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both peacemakers and disputants concluded that helping to solve problems effectively, displaying kindness, demonstrating responsibility and commitment, and using effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills are essential attributes for peer
mediators. Additionally, disputants perceived the value of fairness as an important attribute for peacemakers to possess.

In regard to implications for program improvement, peacemakers and disputants determined that recruiting more peacemaker’s who display kindness, demonstrate fairness, demonstrate responsibility and commitment to the program, and uses effective communication and problem solving skills, are key elements for the success of the peacemaker program. Peacemakers identified additional views for program improvement that differed from disputants which included providing more incentives and meetings for peacemakers, having two or more sets of peacemakers serve duty, having peacemakers gather more disputant information, and providing guidance and support to address uncooperative disputants, teasing from disputants, and absence from class to serve duty.

Qualitative Data Summary

Interpretation was derived directly from the peacemakers’ and disputants’ actual experience during their peer mediation session. Triangulation was achieved using peacemaker focus groups, disputant questionnaires, and peacemaker questionnaires, adding structural corroboration to the study. Eisner (1998) identifies “structural corroboration” as a means through which multiple types of data are related to each other to support or contradict the interpretation and evaluation of the data (p. 110).

Research question 1: What is the peacemaker’s perception of his or her attributes in a peer mediation program?

This research question generated a summation of major themes, which transpired in describing what constitutes the peacemakers’ perception of their attributes in a peer mediation program.
mediation program. The findings of the peacemaker questionnaires and focus groups concluded:

1. Peacemakers should demonstrate effective problem solving skills.
2. Peacemakers should demonstrate kindness.
3. Peacemakers should demonstrate responsibility and commitment to the program.
4. Peacemakers should demonstrate effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

Research question 2: What is the disputant's perception of the peacemaker's attributes in a peer mediation program?

The findings from the disputant questionnaires concluded:

1. Peacemakers should demonstrate effective problem solving skills.
2. Peacemakers should demonstrate kindness.
3. Peacemakers should demonstrate responsibility and commitment to the program.
4. Peacemakers should demonstrate effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills.
5. Peacemakers should demonstrate fairness.

Research question 3: What are the implications for program improvement?

1. Recruit more peacemakers who demonstrate kindness, fairness, responsibility and commitment to the peacemaker program, and effective problem solving and communications skills.
2. Provide more incentives, rewards, and meetings for peacemakers who perform peacemaker responsibilities.

3. Have two or more sets of peacemakers serve duty on the playground.

4. Have peacemakers gather more information from disputants to promote a better understanding of them.

5. Provide guidance and support when peacemakers encounter uncooperative disputants, to stop teasing directed toward peacemakers, to cease interruptions from bystanders during conflict resolution, and to modify scheduling for peacemakers who are required to be absent from class, due to fulfilling their responsibility with meeting peacemaker obligations.

**Qualitative Results Summary**

The purpose of this area of the study was to conclude the students' perception of the attributes of peer mediators. Data derived from open-ended questions produced a profile of attributes that peacemakers and disputants agreed peacemakers should possess.

A peacemaker should be:

1. **Responsible and committed**: The peacemaker should demonstrate responsibility and commitment to the peacemaker program, hence, attending meetings, consistently serving on duty, and fulfilling expectations of the peacemaker program throughout the entire school year.

2. **Kind**: The peacemaker should be kind, polite, and considerate in facilitating a peer mediation session.
3. **Effective communicator and listener:** The peacemaker should have the ability to demonstrate good verbal and non-verbal interpersonal communication skills to empower disputants with problem solving.

4. **Effective problem-solver:** The peacemaker should be skilled in assisting the disputants with arriving at a peaceful solution that both disputants can mutually agree on.

   Additionally, disputants exclusively indicated that a peacemaker should be fair and maintain neutrality when intervening with a conflict. This attribute may have differentiated from the peacemakers based on findings from the disputants which reflected that some peacemakers may have been likely to “take sides” of a disputant who was a friend. Peacemakers may also not be fully conscientious of how their association with a disputant impacts the peer mediation session. However peacemakers did identify the trait of fairness as being important for program improvement.

   Data that produced an outline of implications for program improvement include:

   1. **Recruitment:** Recruit peacemakers who demonstrate kindness, fairness, responsibility and commitment to the peacemaker program, and effective problem solving and communications skills.

   2. **Incentives:** Provide more incentives, rewards, and meetings and for peacemakers who serve duty.

   3. **Multiple sets of peacemakers:** Two or more sets of peacemakers should be working on the playground.

   4. **Collection of additional disputant information:** Additional personal information should be collected from disputants to promote a better understanding of them.
5. **Guidance and support:** Guidance and support should be provided school-wide for uncooperative disputants, teasing directed toward peacemakers, interruptions from bystanders during conflict resolution, and peacemakers who are absent from class due to fulfilling their responsibility with meeting peacemaker obligations.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to examine the fourth- through sixth-grade students' perception of the attributes of peer mediators at four rural elementary schools located in Pinconning, Michigan. The aim was to assist peer mediation program facilitators by providing a profile of attributes to serve as a component of integration in peer mediation program training and coordination, to enhance the quality of existing and future peer mediation programs. Research questions explored in this study consist of (1) What is the peacemaker's perception of his or her attributes in a peer mediation program? (2) What is the disputant's perception of the peacemaker's attributes in a peer mediation program? and (3) What are the implications for program improvement?

This chapter presents an overview of the problem statement, literature review, and methodology. In addition, results of the study, findings, discussion, conclusion, recommendations for peer mediation programs, and future research are also addressed.

Statement of Problem

A review of literature shows a continued prevalence of uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of peer mediation. Conflict resolution and peer mediation training programs have been accepted on faith, but there is little evidence to validate their effectiveness (Johnson & Johnson, 1995, 1997). According to Kevin Dwyer, special
advisor to the National Mental Health Association in Virginia, “There is no evidence that peer mediation works. . . . We rely on cheap solutions to complex problems and end up spending the money later on in prisons and hospitals” (Zipp, 2001, p. 1).

Peer mediation advocates claim, however, that there are many benefits such as reduction in violence and acts of crime in schools using peer mediation, reduction in counselor and administrator time in dealing with student discord, enhanced self-esteem, improved attendance, and development of leadership and problem-solving skills on the part of students. These claims are supported by self-report and correlational data (Benson & Benson, 1993; Curona & Guerin, 1994, as cited in Gerber, 1999). In addition, literature shows that the key person in a peer mediation program is the peer mediator. Therefore, it seems expedient to review the attributes of effective peer mediators.

**Overview of Literature**

Conflict is a natural and normal part of life, but the severity and frequency of destructively managed conflicts leading to physical and verbal violence seem to be increasing in schools (Stop the Violence, 1994, as cited in Johnson & Johnson, 1996a). Conflict resolution teaches students to use alternatives to violence when resolving their interpersonal and personal problems.

There is also an increase in conflicts as options and decisions necessitated by family, economics, and social stresses increase (Messing, 1993). Children and adolescents who are frustrated and angry have a high probability of physically or verbally acting out against those with whom they have a conflict. The conflict can range from name-calling, pushing and shoving, to the extreme of killing (Wheeler, 1995).
Instruction in conflict resolution is typically presented in conjunction with a classroom or school-wide peer-mediation program (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). Teaching students problem-solving skills through a school-wide conflict resolution program that includes peer mediation can help students resolve the inevitable conflicts they encounter in the school environment (Daunic et al., 2000).

Given the increased attention to school violence and conflict, the review of the literature indicates that numerous schools are implementing peer mediation as a violence prevention program, making a difference in the lives of people who use it. Researchers report that peer mediation is a valuable preventive program that presents benefits such as improved language and communication skills, problem-solving/conflict-resolution skills, listening skills, leadership skills, improvement in climate, improved attendance, empowerment, reduction in violence, reduction in counselor time, reduction in teacher time and principal referrals, improved academics of mediators, improved self-esteem, improved self-discipline, effective conflict resolution in the home, improved responsibility level, improved status, and improved ventilation of feelings.

Literature also shows that in training peer mediators, students should possess skills in being non-judgmental, impartial, open-minded, patient, intelligent, flexible, responsible, enjoyment with helping others, and to be a good listener. Additionally, when choosing peer mediators, the peer mediator should include students who volunteer to be trained, are good role models, represent a cross section of the cultural makeup of the student body, and are able to learn the strategies of mediation.

The peer mediator should also possess other important skills such as people skills, leadership potential, respectfulness toward others, good verbal skills, good listening
skills, commitment to the program for the school year, and ability to honor confidentiality. Other suggested variables for peer mediation selection include grade level, gender, race, socioeconomic status, and placement in special programs, including students at risk for behavior problems, in an effort to represent the entire school body (Daunic et al., 2000).

Essential characteristics for program success include administrative support, selection of peer mediators and program coordinators, peer mediators working in pairs, selling the program, maintaining the program, and having evaluation procedures. Other recommendations include providing training on the playground, allowing peer mediators to carry an outline of the mediation process, starting a comprehensive program in the earlier grades, teaching problem solving to all students, modeling mediation skills, and involving the community.

Methodology

To support the evaluation of a student’s perception regarding the attributes of peer mediators, a qualitative methodological approach was utilized. The qualitative design provided students a chance to express their feelings, to promote insight from their perspective. The data collection procedures included peer mediator focus group discussions and peer mediator and disputant questionnaires.

Focus groups were not conducted with disputants due to my inability to attain informed consents from disputants. I believe it is likely that the disputants may not have wanted to participate in focus groups, due to the possibility of being “labeled” as having difficulty managing conflict effectively.
Results of Study

The students participating in this study represented rural schools where the majority of the population was predominately Caucasian, with low- to-middle income socioeconomic status. Both peacemaker and disputant perspectives of peer mediation were used through the use of focus groups and questionnaires. The project involved focusing on peacemaker and disputant evaluations and solutions, by determining the perceptions of peacemakers and disputants regarding the attributes of peacemakers.

Findings

The main findings from the data were presented in chapter 4. Based on the original research questions, a framework is provided for the summary of findings.

Research question 1: What is the peacemaker’s perception of his or her attributes in a peer mediation program?

This research question generated a summation of major themes, which transpired in describing what constitutes the peacemakers’ perception of their attributes in a peer mediation program. The findings of the peacemaker questionnaires and focus groups concluded:

1. Peacemakers should demonstrate effective problem solving skills.
2. Peacemakers should demonstrate kindness.
3. Peacemakers should demonstrate responsibility and commitment to the program.
4. Peacemakers should demonstrate effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills.
Research question 2: What is the disputant’s perception of the peacemaker’s attributes in a peer mediation program?

The findings from the disputant questionnaires concluded:

1. Peacemakers should demonstrate effective problem solving skills.
2. Peacemakers should demonstrate kindness.
3. Peacemakers should demonstrate responsibility and commitment to the program.
4. Peacemakers should demonstrate effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills.
5. Peacemakers should demonstrate fairness.

Research question 3: What are the implications for program improvement?

1. Recruit more peacemakers who demonstrate kindness, fairness, responsibility and commitment to the peacemaker program, and effective problem solving and communications skills.
2. Provide more incentives, rewards, and meetings for peacemakers who perform peacemaker responsibilities.
3. Have two or more sets of peacemakers serve duty on the playground.
4. Have peacemakers gather more information from disputants to promote a better understanding of them.
5. Provide guidance and support for uncooperative disputants, stop teasing directed toward peacemakers, cease interruptions from bystanders during conflict resolution, and modify scheduling for peacemakers who are absent from class due to serving on duty as a peacemaker.
Discussion

While my research supported previous research that mediators should demonstrate skills with being impartial, respectful, responsible, committed, helpful, and good with verbal and non-verbal communication skills, my research did not conclude that importance should be placed on intelligence, leadership potential and confidentiality, as founded by others. My research did however differ from previous research in terms of emphasizing the need for peacemakers to exhibit kindness, as well as skill in using effective methods of problem solving for the purpose of reaching a peaceful solution to conflicts.

This emphasis may have been derived based on the fact that the peacemakers and disputants who participated in this study utilized a specific technique of problem solving. This involves using the words (1) TELL your side of the story and how you feel, (2) THINK of a solution, (3) CHOOSE a solution, and (4) DO your part of the solution. The procedure serves to promote expression of feelings and an efficient process for conflict resolution. The process is outlined on a guide pad to assist peacemakers with remembering their function.

This finding coincides with Humphries (1999) who found that some students omitted a mediation step involving the discussion of the disputants' feelings and Johnson et al. (1992) who reported that elementary school mediators found it difficult to master skills involving the expression of feelings. According to Sticher (1986), it is recommended to use simple words and concrete methods of communicating the points of mediation to younger students (as cited in Shulman, 1996).
In reference to program improvement, my research supported previous research in relation to the need for recruiting peacemakers who will maintain responsibility and commitment to the peacemaker program. My research also stressed that mediators should possess kindness and effective problem solving skills, which was not found in the search of literature.

Additionally, providing more incentives for peacemakers who perform peacemaker responsibilities, having multiple sets of peacemakers serve duty on the playground, and having peacemakers gather more information from disputants to promote a better understanding of the disputants were also significant factors for program improvement. Other suggestions for program improvement include to provide guidance and support when peacemakers encounter uncooperative disputants, to stop teasing directed toward peacemakers, to cease interruptions from bystanders during conflict resolution, and to modify scheduling for peacemakers who are required to be absent from class, due to fulfilling their responsibility with meeting peacemaker obligations.

**Conclusion**

In this study, the inquiry examined the fourth- through-sixth grade students’ perception of the attributes of peer mediators. There were several similarities between the disputants and peacemakers. Data derived from open-ended questions produced a profile of attributes that peacemakers and disputants agreed peacemakers should possess. A peacemaker should be:

1. **Responsible and committed:** The peacemaker should demonstrate responsibility and commitment to the peacemaker program, hence, attending meetings,
consistently serving on duty, and fulfilling expectations of the peacemaker program throughout the entire school year.

2. **Kind**: The peacemaker should be kind, polite, and considerate in facilitating a peer mediation session.

3. **Effective communicator and listener**: The peacemaker should have the ability to demonstrate good verbal and non-verbal interpersonal communication skills to empower disputants with problem solving.

4. **Effective problem-solver**: The peacemaker should be skilled in assisting the disputants with arriving at a peaceful solution that both disputants can mutually agree on.

Additionally, disputants exclusively indicated that a peacemaker should be fair and maintain neutrality when intervening with a conflict. This attribute may have differentiated from the peacemakers based on findings from the disputants which reflected that some peacemakers may have been likely to “take sides” of a disputant who was a friend. Peacemakers may also not be fully conscientious of how their association with a disputant impacts the peer mediation session. However peacemakers did identify the trait of fairness as being important for program improvement.

Data that produced an outline of implications for program improvement include:

1. **Recruitment**: Recruit peacemakers who demonstrate kindness, fairness, responsibility and commitment to the peacemaker program, and effective problem solving and communications skills.

2. **Incentives**: Provide more incentives, rewards, and meetings and for peacemakers who serve duty.
3. **Multiple sets of peacemakers**: Two or more sets of peacemakers should be working on the playground.

4. **Collection of additional disputant information**: Additional personal information should be collected from disputants to promote a better understanding of them.

5. **Guidance and support**: Guidance and support should be provided when peacemakers encounter uncooperative disputants, to stop teasing directed toward peacemakers, to cease interruptions from bystanders during conflict resolution, and to modify scheduling for peacemakers who are required to be absent from class, due to fulfilling their responsibility with meeting peacemaker obligations.

The attributes and implications learned from this study can be emphasized as valuable factors in promoting a successful peer mediation program, therefore, it would be worthwhile to consider these factors when training peacemakers and coordinating a peacemaker program.

**Recommendations for Peer Mediation Programs**

The following section focuses on suggestions for program improvement, which emerged as a result of the focus groups and questionnaire. Some of the recommendations were explicitly stated while others emerged during the analysis and researcher interpretation. The application of the following principles reflect the importance of implementing programs that recognize the importance of student experiences to impact elementary peer mediation programs:

1. Allow trained peacemakers to participate in encouraging other students to join peacemakers, which creates a perspective from the child’s point of view. Having a
“recruitment day,” in which trained peacemakers provide role-plays in the classrooms, may serve as a twofold benefit to which students are taught communication skills using the peacemaker philosophy and classmates can also nominate potential peacemaker candidates.

2. Facilitators should consider addressing attributes of effective problem solving, kindness, fairness, responsibility and commitment, and effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills when selecting and training peacemakers.

3. Providing ongoing meetings (at least once per month) that can help to promote responsible, committed, fair, and positive peacemakers. Consistent meetings additionally reinforce the necessary support needed by peacemakers and allow for continued role-play practice to sharpen skills and an opportunity to discuss questions and concerns. Consideration should also be made regarding provision and training during the onset of fall semester and winter semester.

4. Establish monthly peacemaker captains to provide coverage during absences.

5. All school staff, including playground personnel, should be instructed regarding the peacemaker procedures. Playground personnel play a vital role in supporting peacemakers and are accessible in the event of the occurrence of peacemaker taunting.

6. Furnish incentives on a regular basis, which strengthens commitment to the program. Incentives do not have to be costly and could be as simple as providing snacks during the meeting time, having a peacemaker walk hour or one free gym hour, a computer hour, a library hour, or an art hour. Local businesses may also serve as a source to provide donated items as a thank-you to peacemakers for promoting peace.
7. Provide a monthly report via the school’s public address system to announce how many conflict’s peacemakers solved the preceding month. This promotes a peacemaker’s motivation and drive to maintain their participation and synergy with the program, as well as encourages staff support of the peacemakers and the program.

8. Issue a peacemaker pad that can serve as a specific guideline of procedures. Also provide checklist report slips to track the typology of conflicts and the status of conflict resolution. Require peacemakers to have their report slip checked by playground personnel following duty. This facilitates responsibility and accountability for the peacemakers, in addition to providing monitor and support from playground personnel. Tracking school conflicts can also be beneficial in addressing areas where community building is needed and the promotion of a non-violent school environment. Consequently, a collection of records can serve as a reminder for peacemakers to follow up with disputants in 1 week, to inquire if the agreement is working or to offer additional help as needed.

9. Students in the primary grades can learn the peacemaker philosophy early on. Instructing younger students can promote consistency and precise communication skills to engage in conflict resolution.

10. Ongoing guidance and support from school staff is essential for the strength of a peacemaker program. Students should feel comfortable in seeking direction from staff during instances of possible taunting from peers, uncooperative disputants, and interruptions from bystanders during conflict resolution. Specifically, support from administration also reflects the overall point of view from staff and students.
Recommendations for Future Research

This study did not include using disputants in focus groups. Consideration should be given to include disputants when conducting focus groups for future research. Additionally, students who have not been involved in a peer mediation session, as well as addressing why some students are receptive to accept peer mediation assistance while others are not, may also be a worthwhile investigation.

Another factor that generated from this research consists of the value of including parents, teachers, administrators, and other school staff, such as playground staff, for future study in examining the impact of peer mediation. These key people are vital in reinforcing the regular practice of conflict resolution in a wide array of settings.
APPENDIX A

LETTERS AND CONSENTS
Proposal to Pinconning Area School District

Student perception of effectiveness of peer mediation:
Implications for program improvement.

Proposal for Research at the Pinconning Area School District
Michelle Bell, MSW, CSW, ACSW
Research for completion of Ed.D. in Leadership
Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan
Supervising Professor: Elsie Jackson, Ph.D.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to address my interest with the success of peer mediation performance improvement at the Pinconning Area School District elementary schools. The success of performance improvement contributes greatly to the planning and design phases of improvement efforts. This research is an attempt to examine and develop methods to improve the quality of peer mediation at the Pinconning Area School District. This research will explore student and disputant perception regarding the effectiveness of peer mediation. Focus groups with both peacemakers and disputants will provide data regarding current perceptions of the program as well as suggestions for change. Peacemaker and disputant focus groups may be valuable for ongoing performance improvement efforts.

Research Design
Qualitative methods will be utilized for data collection. Subjects will be selected based on the collection of report slips from participation in peer mediation sessions during the 2000 – 2001 school year. Students who do not have parent consent to participate will be excluded from the study. Subjects will be involved in one focus group, which will be held in the Pinconning Area School District. Each focus group will meet one time for approximately one hour and will consist of no more than eight participants.

Data Analysis
The data will consist of transcript narratives taken from audio taped interviews and researcher field notes. In addition, analyses will ensure all descriptors of student identities will be kept anonymous to protect the confidentiality of participant responses.

Potential Benefits
The proposed study has a number of potential benefits for the Pinconning Area School District. First, the research will make efforts to understand and address the effectiveness of peer mediation, thus, providing valuable information regarding the strengths and weaknesses of current practices of peer mediation. This information will be shared with the school social work staff in order to generate improvement strategies.
leading to efficacy. Consequently, increased efficacy promotes increased problem solving and conflict resolution. Second, the invitation for meaningful student collaboration with improvement effort conveys a message that the Pinconning Area School District seeks and values student involvement. In turn, the meaningful involvement of students will likely enhance ownership and greater commitment to performance improvement changes. As stated by Backer (1995), “The single best validated principle in the literature on management of change is that the people who will have to live with the results of change need to be deeply involved in designing and implementing new processes. Unfortunately, they rarely are.” Third, this project will foster a collaborative effort between the Pinconning Area School District and the researchers of Andrews University. Finally, if this exploratory project proves useful, the procedures used in this research may be tailored to assist with ongoing evaluation of the peer mediation program.

**Potential Risks**

This research is not intended to cause any discomfort or deception of participants. Student participants will be invited to participate through an informational letter sent to parents, specifying the parameters of the study (Please refer to attached letter). These letters will be sent to the parents of peacemakers and disputants in grades four through six. The letter will also consist of Informed Consent documentation, as well as project description. For all informants in this study, participation is completely voluntary and no incentives will be offered.

This research promotes the evolution of ideas in the group context. However, if the informant strongly oppose group participation, appropriate accommodations will be made to conduct individual interviews. It should be noted that confidentiality of group discussion is included in the Informed Consent Letter. As such, group participants will be strongly encouraged to refrain from discussing group member identities and/or input outside of the group context. Nevertheless, participants will be reminded that confidentiality is never 100% guaranteed.

**Confidentiality and Consent**

During analysis, personal identifiers will be used only to differentiate among informant responses on transcriptions from audio taped focus groups. Each participant will be issued a code name and number (e.g., Peacemaker #1 or Disputant #3). There is no follow-up phase planned; thus, the inclusion of names with the data will not be necessary. It should be noted that the parent of each participant would be required to review and sign Informed Consent documentation. For a complete description of the Informed Consent documents, please see the attached letter.

**Conclusion**

The consideration of this proposed research is greatly appreciated and it is my belief that this research will promote peer mediation efficacy. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Michelle Bell at 879-2301. Thank you.
Student-Parent Informational Letter and Informed Consent

Student perception of effectiveness of peer mediation: Implications for program improvement.

Michelle Bell, MSW, CSW, ACSW
Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan
School of Education

Dear Student/Parent/Guardian,

The school social workers of the Pinconning Area School District are committed to providing an outstanding peacemaker program at our elementary schools. In an effort to evaluate our peacemaker program and make necessary changes, Andrews University of Berrien Springs, Michigan will be conducting research in our district, with our school social workers and students who have been involved with peer mediation. The purpose of the research is to look at methods to improve the quality of peer mediation at the Pinconning Area School District. The research will explore peacemaker and student thoughts and feelings regarding the effectiveness of peer mediation, as well as suggestions for program improvement.

Since it is important to hear the voice of our students, we are asking for volunteers to participate in a focus group. We know each student has different situations and we would like to hear about their experience(s). The aim of the focus group is to ask students to evaluate their experience with the peacemaker program and to make suggestions for change. Our primary interest is to understand what happens between peacemakers and students and how to evaluate the program. The benefits of this research can provide valuable information regarding current practices to improve the peacemaker program, which can improve student and school-wide problem solving and conflict resolution.

Students will be asked to participate in one focus group in the Pinconning Area School District, which will be led by two school social workers employed with the District. The focus group will last approximately 1 1/2 hours in their own school and will be held during the later part of May, 2001. To ensure that we do not miss any valuable input, we will be taking notes, audio taping the discussions, and later transcribing them to determine common themes of experience. Though responses will be taped, student names will not be identified. Each participant will be issued a code name and number. The information communicated by your child will be shared with the school social work staff.

Participation with this project is voluntary and not designed to address sensitive issues or cause any discomfort; however, if your child feels that he or she does not want to continue to participate at any time throughout the focus group, they may choose to discontinue without any repercussions. Though we prefer your child participate in a group setting, if he or she is completely uncomfortable, the social worker will provide the option of an individual interview. Further, student responses will be taken very seriously and therefore it is asked that responses are as honest and open as possible.
In order to protect the confidentiality of each person's responses, it is asked that all information stay within the group. In addition, researchers will code and analyze the information provided in such a way to ensure that no participant's names will be identified. Audiotapes will also be destroyed within one year from time of taping.

If your child has permission to participate in a focus group, please complete this form and return it to the office of your child's school. We strongly encourage the participation of your child as he or she can make a difference with the peacemaker services.

Please note that there is no form of payment or reimbursement for participation in the research. If you have any questions about this research project or require additional information regarding rights or related matters, please feel free to contact Michelle Bell, School Social Worker at Pinconning Central Elementary, 605 W. Fifth, Pinconning, Michigan 48650 or by calling (517) 879-2301.

I have read and understood the above information and have received a copy of this consent form. I am aware that I have the opportunity to ask questions and receive satisfactory answers before consenting to the participation of this study. I understand my child's participation is voluntary and that he or she may withdraw at any time.

Student signature __________________________ Date ___________
Parent/guardian signature ______________________ Date ___________
Investigator signature __________________________ Date ___________
Witness ________________________________________ Date ___________
School Letter of Project Approval

To: Michelle Bell  
From: Jon Felske  
Date: May 14, 2001  
Re: Research approval

The proposal you submitted regarding "Student perception of the attributes of peer mediators: Implications for program improvement" is supported and approved as a study with the elementary peer mediation program of the Pinconning Area School District. I understand that this study is to complete a doctoral degree at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW, QUESTIONNAIRE, AND REPORT RECORD
Peacemaker Focus Group Questions

1) What do you like most about being a peacemaker?
2) What type of words does a good peacemaker use?
3) What kind of characteristics would make someone peacemaker of the year?
4) What can a peacemaker do to make the program work?
5) What worked well between you and your disputant?
6) What was difficult or didn’t work well, when working with a disputant?
7) What types of things do you do to help disputants?
8) Of all of the things a peacemaker does, what do you think helps students the most?
9) What do you dislike most about being a peacemaker?
10) What suggestions do you have to improve the peacemaker program?
Pinconning Peacemaker Program Questionnaire

Grade__________

1) Are you a peacemaker? ____Yes ____No
2) Have you ever talked with a peacemaker about a problem? ____Yes ____No
3) What do you like most about peacemakers?
4) What type of words does a good peacemaker use?
5) How has your peacemaker experience changed your relationship with others?
6) What kind of changes or improvements have you noticed about yourself since your peacemaker experience?
7) How do you solve problems since your peacemaker experience?
8) What kind of characteristics would make someone peacemaker of the year?
9) What can a peacemaker do to make the peacemaker program work well?
10) What type of things does a peacemaker do that works well or is the most helpful?
11) What type of things does a peacemaker do that doesn’t work well or is unhelpful?
12) What suggestions do you have to improve the peacemaker program?
13) Would you recommend your classmates to see a peacemaker? Why?
Peacemaker Report

Date: ______________________

Peacemaker: ______________________
Peacemaker: ______________________

Disputant: ______________________
Disputant: ______________________

Conflict: [ ] Fighting [ ] Teasing [ ] Threatening
[ ] Rumor [ ] Pushing [ ] Name-calling
[ ] Property [ ] Friendship
[ ] Other ______________________

Conflict resolved: [ ] Yes [ ] No

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Peacemaker Focus Group Transcripts

1. What do you like most about being a peacemaker?

Central

P7: After you resolve the conflict, you just feel good inside.
P6: I like being a peacemaker because I like helping other people.
P2: I feel as if we are helping other kids, preventing bombings at the schools and kids shooting other people, and all that kind of thing.
P1: I like setting examples for the little ones.

Garfield-Fraser

P1: I like that we can help solve problems and make peace.
P4: I go with her, she pretty much says it.
P2: We can respect other kids.

Linwood

P3: I like helping people solve their problems on the playground.
P4: I agree with her.
P6: You learn how to solve problems and talk instead of fight.
P1: You can help people from not fighting.
P2: I agree.
P5: I have the same answer.

Mt. Forest

P6: I like that we can help other kids solve their problems and make them,
say if they are fighting with someone, be friends again or help them solve their problem and I think you get a good sense of pride out of that too.

P5: I like it because you learn how to deal with problems besides violence.
P4: I like it because it helps you deal with things that you are going to have to deal with when you get older.
P3: I like it because you can help people to become better friends.

2. What type of words does a good peacemaker use?

Central

P1: Use soothing words, it’s okay, it’s okay to be mad, we can understand your position.
P3: Use the words please and thank you and always try to support the other people’s problems.

Garfield-Fraser

P1: They use, like, friendly words, not mean and nasty words.
P4: Not words like “shut up” and “stupid thing”, kinder words like, “please don’t interrupt while the other person is talking”.
P5: When your solving a problem, be nice to the kids.

Linwood

P1: They use ‘it’s okay’.
P3: They use nice and kind words so that the person they are listening to doesn’t get mad.
P4: Respect, they use respect so they can respect each other.
P5: Not words like shut up.
P2: I agree with #3.

P6: They look at both sides and say something good about both sides and something bad.

Mt. Forest

P6: They use their manners when they are around people that they want to help, or just everyday. Like please and thank you.

P2: They use words that won't hurt other people’s feelings or what they think.

P1: They use words that aren’t violent.

P5: Peacemakers will probably use words that they thought about before they went because they want to make sure they don’t hurt anybody.

P6: They use words that don’t make it sound like they are taking sides, they don’t use cuss words.

P3: They use words to help the people.

3. **What kind of characteristics would make someone peacemaker of the year?**

Central

P7: When people take out their time from recess to help another person or maybe their peacemaker partner is absent or something.

P4: In the morning when you open the doors for other kids and you’re in the hallways checking out the kids and someone else comes to join you because you don’t have anyone else, like someone is absent.

P3: In the morning when there are tons of boys around, and stuff, and they still go through it.
P2: Someone who is always on duty and willing to help other people with problems and they are out in the hallway everyday and even if somebody doesn’t have a partner, they are willing to go out and go on duty.

Garfield-Fraser

P1: If they do their duty every time they are scheduled.

P2: If they are responsible for the other kids and make peace.

P5: If they are not late, either, for recess.

P4: If they are, like, really nice to the kids that they are trying to help and not take any sides, or anything like that.

Linwood

P4: Honesty.

P5: Not laughing at what other people have to say.

P6: Solve the most problems.

P1: Being good at peacemaking.

P2: Listening to what they have to say.

P3: I agree with #5.

Mt. Forest

P4: Being polite to other people and solving as many problems as they can without being friends.

P5 Being nice and being friendly, helpful and will listen to problems.

P2: Being nice and not starting fights with other people even though they are peacemakers.

P3: They would be kind and not give up.
P6: They would follow all the rules that, even the people that they are helping would follow.

P4: They would even act like a peacemaker.

4. What can a peacemaker do to make the program work?

Central

P1: They can try to solve as many conflicts as they can and keep trying every year to sign up again.

P6: Keep trying.

P7: Keep on trying and go with the flow.

P4: Try and try harder.

Garfield-Fraser

P5: Make the program better.

P4: Everything that will help the two people, or however many people, solve the problem.

Linwood

P6: Follow directions.

P5: Not fight with other peacemakers.

P4: Respect what they both have to say to you.

P1: Help other peacemakers.

P2: Be polite to the other peacemakers.

P3: Listen to what they have to say and don’t interrupt.

Mt. Forest

P3: They could cooperate.
P2: They could help solve problems.

P6: They could try to remember when it is their turn to go out on the playground and not complain about it, like ‘I don’t feel like doing it today’.

P4: Being as polite as possible to the people.

P5: By following the rules.

5. What worked well between you and your disputant?

Central

P1: Soothing words and really trying to help them out and being sincere with your words.

P3: If they are your friends they can understand more and you can help them out a lot better.

P1: Keeping the conflict private between others, even if it is your best friend, or your mom or your principal, expect to keep it private if the disputant wanted it to be kept quiet.

P2: Give each person the chance to tell what they feel about the conflict.

Garfield-Fraser

P1: If they cooperate it helps us and it works well between us because then we don’t have to mess around and go get aides.

Linwood

P2: Being kind to them and they are being kind to you.

P4: I agree with #2.

P6: That you listened carefully.

P3: That you and the disputant discussed the problem and they didn’t get
mad or anything.

P1: If two of your friends are in a fight then you would be able to help them better then two of the bullies that pick on you.

P5: I agree with #3.

Mt. Forest

P2: It worked well because they could agree and not argue and start an argument with another person.

P5: The disputant and I were both cooperative and took turns speaking.

P3: We helped each other if we had a problem.

6. What was difficult or didn’t work well, when working with a disputant?

Central

P6: Sometimes they might not listen and just go off and play.

P7: They always want to tell their side of the story and if they don’t think what that other person is saying is true, then they just say it out loud that it isn’t true.

P3: They will tease you and will make fun of what you are doing and you just have to learn to do it.

P1: It is difficult when you are working with disabled students sometimes because they don’t necessarily understand what you are trying to do so you have to be patient with them and that is sometimes difficult to do.

P4: Sometimes they don’t agree with how you solve it.

P2: Sometimes you have kids that don’t want to solve their problem but yet don’t want anyone to know about it and they want to have everything their way and they don’t want to listen to what other people have to say.
Garfield-Fraser

P3: They kept walking away.
P1: They didn’t cooperate and kept talking when we were talking.
P2: They would walk away from us.
P4: If they didn’t really want to cooperate, but if one person really wanted to solve the problem the other person wouldn’t stick around long enough.
P5: They wouldn’t work well together as a team.

Linwood:

P2: Some people interrupted.
P3: When you are trying to help them, they would say ‘no’ and yell at you and stuff.
P4: They won’t listen to you when you are trying to resolve the conflict, they won’t talk to you because they are arguing.
P5: One of them would say “yes I want help” and the other one would say no and then they would start fighting over again.
P6: They are talking when you are trying to talk to the people.
P1: I agree with #5.

Mt. Forest:

P1: The disputant often turn away from you and wave to his friends.
P2: They would walk away and not even listen to you.
P3: They would walk away.
P4: One would say, like, ‘we don’t’ have a problem’ and we would say ‘yes you do’.
P5: Sometimes they wouldn’t be truthful and they would make things up and other times they would be like ‘you’re not my teacher, you’re not my mother, I’m not going to listen to you’.

P6: Sometimes they say that want to solve the problem, both of them would, then they would end up walking away or basically not following the rules at all.

P1: Sometimes the disputant will not take the problem seriously.

7. What types of things do you do to help disputants?

Central

P5: Be nice to them.

P7: Use soothing words and stuff like that and sometimes it calms them down.

P4: Tell them please and thank you and use soothing words to them.

P3: Be patient and kind with them.

P2: Give them a chance to tell what they think and how they feel.

Garfield-Fraser

P2: Respecting them in a good way.

P1: Listening to them.

Linwood

P6: You use good words.

P5: You be nice to them and polite.

P4: You tell them it can only be resolved if you work together.

P1: You try to help them solve it.

P2: I agree with #4.
P3: I agree with #4.

Mt. Forest

P2: You could have them listen and help them follow the rules.

P5: We try to make it so it seems like we understand what they are going through.

P6: If they can't come up with a solution on their own you can read the solutions off the list you have or you can just ask them what kind of funs things do true friends do together before they got into this fight.

P1: Let them tell each of their sides of the story.

8. Of all of the things a peacemaker does, what do you think helps students the most?

Central

P1: I think what helps them the most is telling them that "you need to let other people share", you need to give them another point of view, like "this person is really feeling bad and you need to learn how to understand it because you might be in this situation".

P3: You should tell them that it is okay and tell them that you won't tell anybody about it and they can keep it to themselves.

P2: Don't take sides.

Garfield-Fraser

P1: Solving their problems.

P2: Helping those people to make them happy.

Linwood
P3: The way they always are polite.
P4: The way they are polite and respect each other.
P5: The way they respect and don’t laugh at them.
P6: The way they know, like, you’re not a cop, you are just trying to help them solve the conflict.

P1: I agree with #6.

Mt. Forest

P2: Can help them learn to get along and not fight with each other.
P5: By a student talking to a peacemaker, instead of keeping everything in, they can expand it and let it out so they won’t have anger.
P3: It can help them become better friends.
P4: It can let people get something out so that they don’t go home and be nasty to their siblings.
P6: It helps them so that they don’t hold a grudge against the person or anyone else.

9. What do you dislike most about being a peacemaker?

Central

P1: I don’t like being teased by the kids. They are teasing me for something that is doing good and also I don’t like it when sometimes other peacemakers are around and they are not taking any conflicts and there is a lot out there and you are responsible for 2-3 conflicts. It is not fun doing that.
P2: I don’t like when kids say “Oh we have a conflict” and they really don’t. They are just making fun of us.
P3: They bully you around because you are a peacemaker and they tease you and they think they are better than you.

P7: Same thing as them but it is just a wonderful feeling inside when you solve conflicts. It helps to keep on going.

Garfield-Fraser

P4: Sometimes missing part of books if they are doing literature because something on the movie that we just watched was about a book that we read and there is a really good part in the movie that I'm not sure if it was even included in the book, but I had no idea that it was included because I missed it.

P2: You would miss literature and people would walk away from you and you would feel really bad because they walked away.

P1: I agree with them guys because it is sort of, kind of, bad to miss literature because we get tested on it and sometimes we get yelled at for not knowing it.

Linwood

P2: When you are trying to solve a conflict, some people come up and interrupt and then they don't listen.

P4: I agree with #2.

P5: Sometimes the other peacemaker wants to play and not do the conflict.

P6: Sometimes partners don't get along with each other and you fight and start a whole new conflict.

P1: Sometimes they start getting into a bigger fight and start punching each other.

P3: I agree with #2.
Mt. Forest

P2:  I don't like being a peacemaker because often your partner will quit and then you have to find a new partner.

P5:  What I don't like about being a peacemaker is that sometimes if a disputant has a problem and you try to solve it but it gets so bad that you have to make them talk to an adult or a lunch aide, they will hold a grudge against you and say, 'well this person isn't a good peacemaker because they have you talk to an adult'.

P1:  Lots of times the other person you work with, the other peacemaker, doesn't want to work and they just fool around outside.

10. What suggestions do you have to improve the peacemaker program?

Central

P1:  I think we need to be notified more on the P.A.. It is not very often that our P.A. announcer, announces how many conflicts we solved in a month and we need to be notified more.

P3:  We should encourage others to be peacemaker and help others understand that it is very nice to be a peacemaker.

P2:  I think during duty when we have a conflict and when the kids are really upset, sometimes we should separate both of them and talk to one person and then switch partners and talk to the other kids because sometimes they don't want to solve the problem and if they talk to the other person they get very angry and infuriated.

P1:  We should get the two partners to gather information and use it to help
them solve the conflict. Like, if you noticed anything about their personality and if you
talked to them 15 minutes each and you noticed anything about their personality, it might
be easier to know what to say to them and it might help solve the conflict better.

P3: Like the same she said, but you should see what both of them say, if
they say the same thing, then you should find out more information about it, then tell the
other person about the same information and they can get better conflict solving.

P4: What she said.

P5: What she said.

Garfield-Fraser

P1: Having two sets of peacemakers go out in one recess so one set
doesn't have to walk around the whole playground at a time.

P4: I agree with her completely.

P2: I agree with #1.

Linwood

P4: Be nicer to the people that you have to work with and other disputants.

P5: Don't make fun of the people's problems.

P2: I agree with #4.

P3: I agree with #5.

Mt. Forest

P2: You should try to inform more people about the program so maybe
they would want to become a peacemaker and help other people.

P5: Try your best at solving some people's problems and don't just goof
off and think that this is just a fun thing to get away from school.
P6: Maybe make it one grade younger, so more people get a chance to actually experience the peacemaker program.

P3: I think that some people shouldn’t quit because that messes up the program.

P1: I think if they do want to quit then don’t start again.

P5: I agree with #3 and #1 because if you quit then you mess up the whole list and then you have to spend time going through that again.

P6: I don’t like when kids, the disputant, say they will solve the problem and then think about ‘do I really want to do this, why should I listen to the peacemakers, they are kids just like me, why should I listen to them’.

P2: I don’t like how you ask the two disputants if they want to stop the conflict and they both say yes and then they walk away and you didn’t get to solve their problem.

P4: Sometimes people will come up to you and say they have a problem when they actually don’t.

P3: I hate when one person disagrees to solve a problem and one person wants to.

P6: When someone says they have a problem and they are fooling around and say “I’m just mental”, and all that.
REFERENCE LIST


VITA

MICHELLE MAREE BELL
7819 Hospital Road
Freeland, Michigan 48623
(989) 695-9711

EDUCATION:

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION, August 2002
Andrews University- Berrien Springs, Michigan

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK, May 1992
Wayne State University- Detroit, Michigan

BACHELOR OF SOCIAL WORK, May 1991
Saginaw Valley State University- University Center, Michigan
Minor- Psychology

EXPERIENCE:

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR, 1997 - Present
Pinconning Area Schools - Pinconning, Michigan

FACULTY LIAISON, 2000, 2001-2002
Saginaw Valley State University – University Center, Michigan

FIELD PLACEMENT INSTRUCTOR, 1996, 2000 - Present
Saginaw Valley State University – University Center, Michigan

Bay Home Health and Services- Essexville, Michigan

AFFILIATIONS:

Academy of Certified Social Workers
National Association of School Social Workers
Michigan Association of School Social Workers
Pinconning Area Association of School Administrators